

*Painting
in Our Time*

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M. G.

Affectionately to my Mother and Father

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Foreword

SO MUCH has changed in the sixteen years since this book was written that even the original title, *Painting in Public*, has lost its sense. Nobody paints in public any more, as I was recently made uncomfortably aware. I had gone to Europe without an easel, thinking to buy one there. What I wanted was an ordinary *chevalet Belge*, the sturdy, uncomplicated easel which has served I do not know how many generations of landscape painters. I searched Paris, Lisbon, and Madrid, to find all sorts of elegant contraptions for ladies to sketch at while seated, but nothing strong enough to take a fair-sized canvas or tall enough for painting standing up. And then I suddenly realized how long it had been since I had seen what used to be so common in fine weather — a painter working out of doors.

This, of course, is just another evidence of the triumph of abstract art today, a triumph by no means yet complete when this book first appeared. At that time Surrealism and Neo-Romanticism, both of them enemies of abstraction, were still much in public view, and although abstract art had already strong support from the museums, art schools, and universities, figurative painting was still

being taught and its practitioners still highly respected. Today, on the other hand, instruction in representation has practically disappeared from the art schools; our large national and international exhibitions are exclusively non-objective; and although New York has too many one-openings for the daily press to cover, only a small number of them display a recognizable image. Figurative painting still exists, but as an underground.

There are a number of reasons for this: To begin with there is the intellectual character itself of abstract painting whose working principles—unlike those of figurative painting—can easily be formulated in verbal terms and taught in university courses. By concentrating on abstract art, the universities were able to take over the mass instruction of painters. Along with this is the impressive and continuous support abstract art has received from the museums, dealers, and collectors devoted to it. All this serves to explain why there are today so many abstract painters. Their recent and extraordinary prosperity must be attributed to an invention made, I believe, by the New York Abstract Expressionist (or Action) painters—the non-representational picture of grandiose size.

The grandiose picture is a very special genre, and never undertaken except in response to a definite demand. Big pictures are too difficult and too expensive ever to be run up in some vague hope of sale. Their existence is closely connected with

commercial expansion, regal romps, or municipal display. And, as the present book points out, they also present a very special problem in the way of subject matter. Just the same, if there is a demand for big pictures and a subject can be found for them, painters will quickly enough develop techniques for turning them out. The subject is the real difficulty. It must be so unquestionably acceptable that it can offend nobody, and at the same time complex enough to hold the painter's own interest. The great business corporations of to-day provide a market. But all the subjects which have hitherto served present objectionable elements. How inappropriate behind a great director's desk would be a *Battle of Gods and Giants*, or a *Round of Nymphs and Satyrs*, or even an *Apotheosis of the Republican Party!* (And how difficult today would we find the doing of them!) Even a portrait of the director himself would not prove sumptuous enough for his palatial office simply on account of the sobriety of present-day male attire. And dressing him in any other garb would render him ridiculous. On the other hand, an abstract picture with no subject at all is perfectly suitable. It makes no inappropriate comment or embarrassing comparison. Its elaborated surface relieves the austerity of present-day architecture. And its presence on the wall implies only how advanced is the director's taste and, if the picture is large enough and by a famous name, how impor-

tant an official he must be to have it hanging there!

So that today, large abstract paintings sell very well and the well-known younger names go for fabulous prices, almost equaling those of Picasso or Braque. The \$20,000 canvas is not uncommon. In fact, a painter must have sold one for that sum to have arrived. Even the lesser known abstractionists sell well. One remembers in this connection a newspaper account of two young men in Communist territory who were caught attempting to escape to America in a stolen plane, and when asked how they expected to earn their living in this country, answered that they planned to take up abstract painting.

Thus, unlike the time when this book was written, painters are now prosperous. Even figurative painters profit by the boom, even painters living in the provinces. Every middle-class home of any cultural pretensions has an oil painting, sometimes bought from a dealer in the city, sometimes from a painter in the neighborhood. Fifteen years ago this was unthinkable; nobody but the most sophisticated city dweller owned a picture. What everyone had, if they had anything at all, was a color print. Today this is no longer so and the framed and varnished Van Gogh reproduction has ceased to be the standard trade-mark of the intellectual household.

Another difference: New York today, in regard to painting as well as music, is no longer part of

the provinces; it no longer molds its taste on Paris. Nor does London either. The two, along with Paris, are now our painting centers, with Zurich acting as a common clearing house for maintaining international market prices. Each center has its innumerable galleries, picture-buying publics, painters who paint for home consumption and, as final evidence of authority, painters who export to the other centers. Though each of the cities has its special preferences, all of them favor large-scale abstraction. In Paris the abstract market, while still preponderant, is said to show a certain weakening. And everywhere sculpture has had a rebirth.

In one of the chapters of the present book, I had maintained that sculpture's basic subject, the nude, had now become unacceptable, and as a consequence, sculpture as an art was done for. I did not then realize that sculpture had already found in the non-objective another subject where it is even more at home than painting is. The non-figurative painter, if he wishes to avoid all image, is inescapably restricted to the two dimensions of his canvas. The illusion of depth cannot be got on a flat surface without the use of some system of perspective and, to explain the perspective, the depiction of recognizable objects. Sculpture, on the other hand, has no need at all for depiction. It is independent of perspective. It already exists in three dimensions where the non-objective theme — the balance of weights and

stresses — can be given an elaborate expression impossible for the painter working in the flat. And thus sculpture, having adopted painting's freedom in color and texture, and taking over from *collage* the use of the unexpected object, has now beaten non-objective painting at its own game and regained its rightful place in architecture — or at least in entertainment.

One thing, however, has not changed at all. The profession of painting is still run by outsiders. Painters still have little voice in the education of the young and their professional judgment still carries no weight. In 1948 shortly after this book was written, there was held by *Life* magazine in the penthouse of the Museum of Modern Art of New York a much-publicized round-table discussion on the future of modern art. Present and taking part were museum directors, art dealers, collectors, educators, literary men, and journalists. There was not a single painter. The situation defined by this omission still continues. Art criticism is still the perquisite of men of letters, the history of art being taken over by aestheticians and scholars, the contemporary field by poets and journalists. As for teaching, the established painters have long ceased taking pupils into their ateliers as they formerly did. And there are few art schools and fewer universities where a painter will be employed to teach who does not conform to the directives of modern art. In fact, our modern museums now constitute

a sort of unofficial ministry of fine arts, serving among other things to elect American work for showing in foreign countries. So that the non-objective style they favor has now become the trade-mark of Free Nation art, just as academic realism is the official art of Communist countries.

All this is perhaps deplorable, but I do not see anything that can be done about it. Painters are incurably individualistic — that is perhaps their strength — and have never, since the disappearance of the guilds, been successfully organized into any but small groups. Just the same, it is hard on figurative painting which is, after all, the most ancient branch of the art. Figurative painting is still taught in the big professional schools, less expertly, on the whole, than the abstract techniques, and more for its possibilities as a mannerism than as a basic training. At any rate, the figurative painting one sees around leans heavily on over-brilliant brushwork and on over-striking subject matter, as if to justify itself. On the other hand, forming as it does an underground, it has begun to attract the more vigorous and non-conformist of the young who begin to find the conventions of our present modernism limiting, and is, in my opinion, decidedly on the up. Its emergence, however, will certainly be slow. Too much money and too many interests oppose it. But nothing is more certain than that fashions change, and that the official school of today will not be official tomorrow.

Certainly abstract painting is no longer very exciting to us today, nor can it even be very exciting to its practitioners. Modernism is no longer that new. All its inventions and discoveries, without exception, were made before the beginning of the first World War, just as were the inventions and discoveries of modern music. Since that time in both arts there has been much elaboration and exploitation of already existing principles, but little that is radically new. And today, with the techniques so well formulated and the underlying principles so well understood, the avoidance of depiction in painting has become all too safe and easy. I have even heard asserted in its defense — now that it has begun to need one — that since the real source of non-representational design is the subliminal mind, the practice of abstract painting acts as a healthy psychic catharsis extremely beneficial to the painter. This I do not believe. Too many abstract painters, to my knowledge, have passed through analysts' hands. On the other hand, I do not know a single figurative painter who has done so, though I did once encounter an analyst who offered me the treatment free. "Get yourself analyzed," he said, "become an abstract painter and make some money."

But I am afraid that it is now too late. Even the advanced museums sense a change and are announcing a return to the image, but on their own terms, as a new form of mannerism. A good example of

the new direction is the recent "Pop Art" movement — figurative in the sense that it parodies the vulgarities of advertising, or takes for image the exact enlargement of comic strips. Though it pretends to be a return to the anti-art of Dada, sardonically contemptuous of all artistic values, it nevertheless conforms precisely to the most respected tenet of the modern art aesthetic — that novelty itself is progress. The result of this dogma can be seen in the contemporary works our museums consistently display, for the most part a collection of "firsts": the first use of papier mache, of white on white, of wood veneer, where the actual subject matter of the picture is some novelty in the colors, shapes, materials or textures used. However interesting or shocking these devices may have been originally, their final state, once novelty has worn off, is simply decoration. For this is precisely what decorative painting is — painting without an urgent subject — something much more in the domain of arts and crafts than of the profession of painting this book sets out to describe.

MAURICE GROSSER

New York City
1964

Painting
in Our Time

CHAPTER I

Portrait of the Painter

"Mister, is your name Artiss?"

NEGRO CHILD, CHATTANOOGA

A PAINTER in public, whether he is standing on a street corner in his oldest clothes and working at his trade, or in a drawing-room, clean, subdued, and on his guard, is always being asked to answer three very difficult questions. This is number one:

"Mr. Corot, it is so nice to meet a painter. I have a niece who paints too. She has never had a lesson in her life. But she does the most interesting things. She can make copies of Mickey Mouse so that you can't tell them from the original, and the girls she does out of *Vogue* are just lovely. I wish you would come out to see us and look at her work and tell us if you think she has any talent."

The answer I have for that one is very impolite. For I am answering, not what is asked, but what the

questioner really has on his mind. I say that I do not give lessons.

The second question is more difficult.

"Mr. Rembrandt, I am told you paint. We have some very valuable pictures at our home. My great-aunt Elsie brought them back from Europe with her, two very beautiful old masters. I know you love art. I am sure you would love to see them. We have had them hanging over the fireplace and they've got a little dirty, but they are still very beautiful. Last winter it was very cold and one of them fell down and got a hole punched in it, not a very big hole and not in a very important place. Now, I want you to come out to the house one day and clean the pictures for us and mend the hole and tell us how much you think they are worth."

That is a hard one, but I have found my answer. There is an excellent professional restorer at the art museum of a neighboring city. I give his name, say that he would do a better job of cleaning and mending than I could possibly do, that the museum is more competent than I to tell them the value of their pictures, for though I have often painted pictures, I have never yet been tempted to buy one. Then I escape if I can. Invariably before I get very far I encounter the third question. This is its general form:

"Oh, Mr. Landseer. So you are an artist. I just love art. But last winter we went to a place in New York called the Modern Museum. They had the

strangest pictures on the walls, all circles and spots. They didn't make any sense at all; I couldn't even tell whether they were hung right side up. I am sure I could have painted some of them myself. But I know they must be very valuable. Oh, Mr. Landseer, do you paint modern pictures?"

To that I always answer: "No, I paint contemporary pictures," or if the feed line is: "What do you think of modern art?" Nothing is more useful than Gertrude Stein's "I like to look at it." Whereupon, if I can, I flee. In my professional life I am not a teacher, not a picture restorer or dealer or culture vendor. I am a painter. And I do not feel in the least obliged to try to remove that look of injury mingled with respect, of hurt confidence tempered by the love of art, that comes upon the faces of the public when it thinks of itself as looking at modern painting.

My answers are not fair. I know it as well as anybody. They are designed only to stop conversation and enable me to get away, to avoid getting myself involved in the laborious jobs of teaching, restoring, and lecturing, for which I am not at all prepared. Nevertheless, the questions themselves, and all the other questions they imply, are perfectly legitimate. And they are asked so often and so insistently that it is about time that someone actually practicing the profession of painting set about answering them.

Innumerable books have been written about

painting as art. There is even one by Dr. Barnes of Philadelphia called *The Art in Painting*. But all these books are from the point of view of the consumer: the art collector, the art expert, the art publicizer, the educator, the museum director. They are mostly about judgment—how to tell true art from false—and the pictures on which this operation is so successfully performed are those which have been painted long ago, have already been sold, and now repose in some public or private collection. But, though the authors give plenty of excellent rules on how to judge art that has already been judged, there is very little in any of these books that could be applied to the judging of pictures that have yet not even been sold—a thing the reader most certainly must be able to do for himself if he expects anyone in the future to write about *his* collection. In short, the authors speak only of pictures that, by the employment of judgment and money, and by the passage of time, have already become art.

The painter is always more than a little embarrassed by the word “art.” What he does, he thinks of as “painting.” That is his inside view of the manufacturing process. The product, framed, exhibited, and sold, may later become art. But by that time it is a thing outside himself with which he is not at all familiar, for it is no longer a part of his private life. Of course, even the painter himself may eventually come to regard a picture of his,

bought and paid for, put in a good frame, and hung on someone else's wall, as art, but only such a long time after he has painted it that he has forgotten how he did it, and could not possibly do it again. Consequently, art is a subject somewhat out of his province. But painting he knows all about. He does it every day. And it is surprising that so little has been written from the inside by the painter himself to explain what his profession is like, and why and how pictures get made. For although Leonardo kept notes and Delacroix a journal, and Van Gogh wrote letters to his brother, all these are on the order of personal communications or private memoranda not intended for publication. As far as I know, there is no treatise on art as Painting.

Let us begin with a portrait of the artist.

The painting of pictures is an art—that is, it depends on highly individualized skill. It is even a fine art (a phrase, I have been told, Leonardo invented to distinguish his work from the work of everybody else), and the painter of pictures is an artist. But every artist is not a painter. He may be a writer, or an architect, or a sculptor, or a composer, or an executant of music, or an actor, or a dressmaker, or a surgeon, or a mathematician, or a cook. Most of these artists have different sorts of lives. Opera singers will live in apartments decorated like a box at the opera, all red and velvet and gold—it makes them feel at home. Sculptors

will inhabit damp ground-floor studios where there are no stairs to impede the hauling of plaster casts, and where clay will not dry too fast. Actors live by night, painters by day, and poets any time they can. All this is natural. The different arts have different subject matters, different habits of work, different publics, and get paid for in different ways. There are, however, similarities among certain of them and when there are, their respective practitioners behave very much alike as well.

In purpose music and mathematics are in no way similar, the one providing, I am told, visceral, the other, intellectual pleasures. But the mathematician and the composer are very much alike indeed. Theirs are both sedentary occupations, and they are both likely to be extremely neat both in their persons and in all the other details of their living. The difference on paper between a B and a C sharp, or the presence or absence of an n subscript is to the eye slight but to the sense important, and this necessary meticulousness is generally carried over into private life. Both composers and mathematicians write hermetic and self-contained pieces, and are accustomed to address themselves to a small but extremely well-organized public. Their work is very quickly known within the brotherhood, and very slowly, if at all, to the general public. Both devote a considerable part of their trade journals to the critical examination of each other's produc-

tions. They themselves educate the young of their professions and thus hand down the traditions of their orders direct and unimpaired. Both are usually found leading sheltered lives under academic auspices, their money coming more frequently from teaching or endowments than from a popular demand for their works.

The instrumentalist, the singer, the actor, and the surgeon can all be grouped together, and they generally understand one another very well. They all have a closer contact with the public than do the practitioners of other arts. Success to them is not a private satisfaction or a future fame, but an immediate and public reaction. Their success can be measured by applause. More than anyone else they rely upon temperament and the ability to rise to the occasion. For their arts must be performed within a certain limit of time. During that limited time, which is also the time of their public appearance, they must be supermen. Before and after does not matter. In private they may moon around in bedraggled bathrobes and appear as half-witted as they please. No one sees them then. They exist only in public. So that the closer they approach the big time, the more exuberant become their personal appearances, the more uninteresting their private personalities, and the less fun they are to be left with alone. Because their usefulness to the public is easily judged, the pay for their services is

easily apportioned, and they are generally found organized in unions or guilds for their mutual protection.

The sculptor, the landscape gardener, and the architect form another group. If there were an equal demand for their services they would all act alike. But there isn't, so they don't. All three work in the domain of public display and magnificence. But the architect has another field as well. He must provide comfort as well as grandeur, build homes as well as cathedrals, and here he can operate as a small manufacturer turning out a needed commodity. Consequently, the architect can be independent of the rich, of the corporations, and of the governmental bodies, as the sculptor and the landscape gardener cannot. But when the architect's clients are the rich and the powerful, he behaves like the sculptor and the landscape gardener. This is the pattern: if they are employed by the rich, all three do small works and develop a personal and characteristic style, a trade-mark that enables the client to know at a glance the name attached to the work he is buying. If they work for corporations or for the government, they have big commissions to execute, more than they can do unaided. Consequently, they must employ many assistants, hire large working quarters, and pay high rents; once the establishment is going, they must keep it going by getting other big commissions. As a result, they must cultivate a neutral style, at once pleasing to

committees and not beyond the powers of their assistants to sustain.

The architect and the landscape gardener do not dress like the sculptor. The first two only draw their designs, a clean and sedentary occupation, and would never think of laying a brick or planting a tree. The ones you generally see are prosperous and have jobs and will dress as much like gentlemen as any other member of a country club. They have both gone to college. The sculptor, on the other hand, has probably not gone to college. A systematic knowledge of past styles is not useful to him as it is to them. And though he too wears tweeds, his are more likely to be of a liberal than of a scholastic cut. His hair will be wilder than theirs (an indication of his political sympathies), and his nails full of clay because he works with his hands. He is generally poorer and stronger than the others, more attentive to his own musculature and less to his respectability, and far more interested in a useful variety in his sex life.

Novelists and literary workers in general are ordinary citizens, occupying known places in the republic of universal literacy. It is they who, for the most part, constitute the intellectual world. They work in solitude, often at night when the house is quiet, and for their intellectual equals. Their public is voracious, their talent ferreted out by avid publishers, and their income relatively secure. For the printing presses must be fed. To this order, as

an esteemed but less prosperous and little read subclass, belong the poets. These, during their youth (before they have ceased to be astonished by the subject), employ the most advanced techniques of assonance and association to write about love. The poets, along with the sculptors, are the chronically unemployed of the arts. For in the contemporary world the subject matters most natural to both—personal romanticism and the human nude—however much appreciated in private, in public are now both extremely unfashionable.

The literary men with artistic pretensions, both the prose writer and the poet, have a characteristic that sets them apart from the ordinary citizen, and usually rather annoys him when he encounters it. Although they both use words as tools, the prose writer is easily persuaded that all words have fixed and universally accepted significations, while the poet believes that the intense personal connotations he himself has added to the meanings of certain words are actually what these words mean to everybody else. Consequently we all, at one time or another, find ourselves engaged in bitter disputes with them both—with the prose writer because, as laymen, we have used a word carelessly without due regard to its definition in the dictionary, and with the poets because we have used the word without knowing what the word meant to the poet. All this, making the private life of these workers quarrelsome and their love affairs dramatic, is not unuseful

in supplying them with a subject matter in time of dearth. It is this that they think of as human relations.

Although in the strictest sense of the word the interior decorator is an artist, I did not include him among the artists, because for the most part he does not work like one. He is more of an agent, a go-between, a man who knows where things can be bought and what is to be had, a salesman for furniture, fabrics, and taste, and he lives very close to the manufacturers of these things. Although it might be supposed that he patronizes the painter as well, actually he never buys a picture. Partly because he knows nothing about pictures (he doesn't have to because his clients certainly know nothing about pictures either), partly because hand-painted oil paintings are expensive, and if a client wants a picture, he will prefer to buy it himself and save the added expense of the decorator's commission. Partly also because a picture of any force, originality, or value will, in spite of the decorator's best intentions, dominate any interior he can invent.

A good example of what the decorator tries to avoid is the painting of Matisse—so brilliant and overpowering that if one of his pictures is hung on a wall nothing else in the room can be seen. The only way to bring the room back into kilter is to counterbalance it with another Matisse, and then with a third. If you buy one Matisse, you be-

come a collector. And for the decorator, a collector of pictures is a client lost.

Consequently, if the decorator cannot avoid using a picture, what he will select will be the most innocuous color print in the fanciest frame he can procure. The one-time vogue of Marie Laurencin was a heaven-sent boon to him. Her colors are always charming and always the same. Her little girls without noses stay nicely on the wall, do not have to be looked at twice, and are not out of place in the frilliest of rooms. Because they are all alike, they can be used as an interchangeable unit in the mass production of interiors with a considerable saving, for the decorator, of both time and thought.

All the same, if one wishes to be charitable, one can overlook the decorator's uncritical dependence on fashion and his commercial associations—which after all are the necessary circumstances of his trade—and call him an artist of a sort. For he uses as his canvas his client's house, as his pigments the drapes and furniture his client can be persuaded to buy, and as his subject matter his client's aspirations. The purpose of his labors is to define becomingly and, if possible, to exalt his client's social standing.

Some people would also include among the artists the journalist and the photographer. In a way they belong there. At any rate, like the decorator, they feel at home in their neighborhood. For just as the decorator depends on ideas originally invented by

some painter, the reporter on a daily paper enjoys all the irregularity of the artist's life, and the photographer tries to reproduce in his exposition prints the characteristics of his favorite school of painting.

Painting and cooking are very much alike, but painters and cooks are not. Both arts employ a specialized sense and a manual dexterity for the gratification of a client. But although most painters like to cook (feeling a lavish irresponsibility in the mixing of condiments whose uneasy fellowship can at most produce an indigestion and not a ruined picture), they do not live or act like cooks. For the painter of our day is a free lance. He is not, like the cook, continually in the employment of one person or of one group. He is a pieceworker and an independent artisan. Consequently, he can have more regard for the rules of his art, for his personal tastes and his reputation in the profession than for the exigencies of any particular clientele.

In this respect, the painter is more like the doctor, who also seeks in his professional body protection from the exigencies of his patients. Doctors and painters understand one another very well. Doctors admire the painters' dexterity and intuition, which are very like their own. They buy paintings, accept paintings from painters in lieu of fees, and have painters as friends. Many paint as well. There is even held in most big cities an annual exhibition of paintings by physicians. The pictures,

though seldom very original, are always surprisingly proficient. In fact, how sensitive the doctor is to the charms of the graphic arts can be told from a glance at the advertising literature he receives. On the adornment of their monthly circulars and encomiums of cure-alls the big drug companies employ art work of a quality, freedom, and advanced technique to be found nowhere else in advertising.

Another evidence of this kinship between painter and doctor is that during the Middle Ages, in Florence and in many other towns, the guild of painters was included as a branch of the larger guild of physicians and apothecaries, a fact that helps explain the surprising competence of the medieval painters in botany and anatomy.

However, unlike both the doctor and the cook, the painter no longer has any serious support from his guild. He is a solitary worker. Unlike either the physician or the *cordons bleus*, he must get his training, not by systematized instruction in the traditions directed by known masters of the art, but in any way he can. More than either the doctor or the cook, the painter must be robust and have no serious bodily disabilities. He cannot afford to. His is by no means an indoor or a sedentary profession. If he paints out of doors, and many painters do, he must be able to carry paints and easel to the top of many a hill. Even indoors, where painting is less athletic, he must walk miles and

miles back and forth between his subject and his picture. For oil painting is practiced standing and walking. Perhaps the painter grinds his own colors. Most certainly he stretches his own canvases. And he does it all until he is quite old, until he must be brought before his landscape in a carriage, until he must have a man to set up his easel for him and squeeze out his paints on his palette. Renoir's fingers grew so stiff in his old age that he could no longer hold his brushes. He was forced to strap them to his wrist and paint with a motion of the shoulder, but he still painted. And the vigorous old age of Titian is proverbial.

Titian is by no means the only one. A friend of mine, wandering in a New England thicket, came upon a little man on guard before a portable fence. Inside the enclosure sat an elderly gentleman busily painting at an easel. The little man stopped my friend and said: "If you please, do not approach any closer. This is the celebrated painter, Mr. John Singer Sargent. He is painting the view of Mount Monadnock." Whereupon Sargent stretched his palette toward his attendant and said: "An inch more of the blue, Rogers, if you please." Is this not an enviable old age?

A productive old age, at least, is not unusual for a painter. The active life he leads safeguards his health. His sight is good. Continually comparing objects with their image on his canvas exercises his eyes. Few painters, except the graphic artist who

works close, wear glasses. Few, as well, have read a book. The painter is the illiterate of the arts. Nevertheless he is not uninstructed, for he has been trained, to some purpose, to see and to remember. If he has done any amount of figure painting, and most painters have, he can converse and charm, charm being the one thing that will keep a sitter still. Mostly he paints by daylight; his day is the sun's. (His week is the time it takes him to finish a picture.) If he is working that month, and even if he is not, he will leave a party early by habit and try to get to bed by midnight. For he wants to get up in the morning and paint; painting is more fun than any party. When he drinks to excess it is for personal or convivial, not for professional, reasons. He does not have to use drink or anything else to furnish him with subject matter or to arouse his emotions and excite him to work. His emotions are not his subject matter. He paints, not with his soul (it is even doubtful if he has one), but with his eye and hand. So he has a calm life and a long one and lives day by day. Gertrude Stein used to say that the painter's life is like this: he gets up in the morning, paints until the light is bad, quarrels with his wife or model, and then goes out to the café for a drink. The painter's life is very much like that indeed.

‘ The sculptor lives in the middle of his works, walks around them by day, bumps into them by night, and eventually comes to look up at them and

say: "I did that—it's pretty good," and himself grows firm and stolid and immovable like his plaster casts. But pictures can be rolled up and got out of the way. Some even get sold. The painter does not have to look at them all the time. He need not be awed by the grandeur of his own talent. He can be an unassuming sort of person. But he is not an intellectual giant. He does not even belong to the intellectual world. He is just a man who has been trained to see, and the picture he makes is just a piece of furniture to hang on a wall.

CHAPTER 2

His Pictures

*"Of course he can paint good.
He's an artist. Artists can paint
better than almost anybody."*

LITTLE GIRL SPECTATOR

To a world used to thinking of art as a cultivation of the sensibilities, the definition at the end of the previous chapter may seem coarse. Nevertheless, it is perfectly true. A picture is a piece of furniture. Its principal use is to adorn a wall. Its purpose is to give pleasure and to explore the visible world. It is made by a man whose hand and eye have been trained to the highest possible point of taste, precision, and skill. And though this picture may be used by the intellectual world to teach a lesson or to illustrate an abstract idea, it remains in itself nothing but an object made by hand.

In fact, painting, although it takes considerable intelligence to make it or to like it, does not be-

long to the intellectual world at all. The techniques of the intellectual world can mostly all be learned from books. On the contrary, painting can only be learned, just as cooking can only be learned, by watching somebody do it who knows how. The intellectual world is made up of things that can be adequately described in words, written down in books, catalogued in libraries, looked up by students, and used in tests. It has not much use for anything else, and the techniques that cannot be handled in this way are not a part of it. Its distinguishing characteristic is the printing press. By this earliest method of mass production any part of the intellectual world can be put out in a multiplicity of examples and at the disposition of anyone who knows the code. A book can be read by anyone who can read. A symphony score can be printed, distributed, and understood without performance by anyone who has had the proper training. A dress design can be stolen. Because all these—even the book, which is written as if it were intended to be read aloud—are plans for performance. The symphony score is silent. The dress design does not clothe. The picture, alone, is not a plan. It is in itself the performance. It is a unique performance belonging to someone. And the dissemination of a picture by all the color presses in the world will only serve to raise the resale value of the original for the collector who owns it.

Pictures, of course, are frequently used by the in-

tellectual world; the painter is called in to illustrate some idea for it. But the idea is only the reason the painter paints, not an integral part of the picture itself. A picture painted with proper skill and knowledge of the craft will last much longer than any idea it might illustrate. An idea seldom remains alive and unchanged even for the space of a generation. However touching the painter might have been about the Immaculate Conception or the class war, the sentiment he is celebrating soon gets old and tired and thin and then invisible and is gone, leaving behind nothing except what the painter actually saw and put down. The Sistine Chapel once expounded a new and shocking system of theology. Now it is nude bodies. What El Greco painted as Catholic devotion now tells of Spanish elegance. Benozzo Gozzoli depicted for the Medici the most touching of all Christian legends, the visit of the Wise Men to the Christ child. Today his frescoes are about only what the painter actually saw, the grave and morning-afterish beauty of the Florentine young.

Nevertheless, there are certain pictures that, on account of their great popular success, have been taken over by the intellectual world as symbols, and are now difficult to see as what they actually are. But these are exceptions, the few times a picture has become a symbol that in turn can be replaced by a word. *September Morn* has a more valid existence as an idea of modest exposure than

as paint on Paul Chabas's canvas. Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* has become to the popular mind the symbol of all cubist painting. Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* must have been the same kind of symbol for the early nineteenth century. For its writers attribute to this picture qualities that our present-day eyes cannot find there, and which must, instead, be the attributes of some general idea like nobility or dignity, for which the picture had to them become a symbol. The *Mona Lisa* is a similar case. The enthusiastic prose of Walter Pater painted on her lips a smile that certainly was not there before. Since his time it has been as impossible for us to see her mouth without the smile, as it will be for our children to see her smile without the mustache drawn there more recently by the perhaps less ecstatic pencil of Marcel Duchamp.*

Even in these few cases, it is the symbol imposed on the picture, and not the picture itself, that has become a part of the intellectual world. Even the most abstract picture in the world, say the *Nude* of Duchamp, is not actually a part of the intellectual world for the simple reason that the picture itself is not an abstraction. It is not the exposition of an idea that can be adequately described in words. It

* The last time I saw this print of *La Gioconda*, wearing its comment by Duchamp, framed, exhibited, and offered for sale in a picture gallery, its price—\$500—excited considerably more public indignation than did its adornment.

is not even a picture of the universal nude on all possible staircases. It is only a hand-painted oil painting hanging in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, of extraordinary market value because nearly all painters agree that it is a masterpiece, because it is unique in the history of painting, and because it remains interesting to look at again and again.

A diagram in Euclid, to the contrary, does belong to the intellectual world. The diagram is an abstraction, the exposition of a general idea. The student is supposed to imagine that it has been drawn in all possible ways, with all possible sizes and angles and proportions. If the idea that is being expounded is really abstract, it is even better to have no diagram at all. Words are more general than any diagram can ever be. Something that can be adequately described in words does not have to be drawn. The diagram is only a crude way of making the important thing, which is the verbal exposition, a little clearer to the student. Consequently, the old geometry textbooks furnished no diagrams. They simply stated: "From the line AB as a base . . ." and let the student figure it out for himself. The diagram took away from the generality of the proposition and made the student consider a particular case.

But the particular case is just what painting, even abstract painting, is about—about a unique set of visual relations that have nothing to do with words in any way. To take the simplest example: imagine

that our painter has taken as a motif for a still life a bowl of apples. From where he is painting he sees a unique set of visual relations. The apples, the bowl, the light, the shadows, the positions and relations of everything make a unique setup. There is not another one like it in the universe. Out of that unique setup our painter composes his picture. If he moves his easel a foot to the left he has another point of view, another set of unique visual relations and another picture. If a fidgety visitor eats one of his apples the painter will be very angry indeed. Because then he will have on his hands a different set of unique visual relations and the subject for quite a different picture from the one he is painting. So that—and this is a general truth—painting is not part of the intellectual world at all. A picture is not an idea, or a lesson, or in any way a general statement. It is a unique piece of the most expensive furniture, made to be hung on a wall and looked at, and it is always about something a painter has seen or imagined.

Consequently, the painter working at his trade is not expounding a philosophy or summing up the universe or rendering its guiding principles simpler to the mind. On the contrary, he is making the world more varied to the eye and adding, by delightful artifice, to its visible and material wealth. That piece of furniture the painter makes is one of the most luxurious and precious and permanent

objects it is possible to possess. Objects made of noble materials do not endure. One of the late Roman emperors, voted by the senate his statue in gold, changed the order to a statue of brass, which he said would last better. But pictures are made of nothing at all. With a yard of cloth, some glue, chalk, oil, and colored powders, the painter creates a treasure, and once this treasure has been approved by his fellow painters (although it may temporarily go out of fashion), it never actually loses its value until it falls apart with decay. During the recent war when there was talk of the wealth of a European refugee, one admired not his bonds or jewels or platinum bullion molded into automobile tools to be smuggled across frontiers, but his collection of Renoirs. Hitler practiced the theft of pictures, as did Napoleon. England saved, or shall we say inherited, the Elgin Marbles. Italy has little farm land left and no forests. She has never had minerals. She is still rich in museums. The speculation in painting values alone provides the livelihood for an entire international trade—the picture dealers.

But the painter not only adds to our wealth; he sees, describes, invents, and civilizes the world as well. He is not alone. Music, literature, and other arts have the same office. Even the lowly detective stories do something of the same thing. That is why everybody reads them; not because our analytical minds need puzzles to solve (few readers try to guess the end), nor because we all hate our

neighbor and delight to see him dead in effigy. If only to play fair and not confuse the reader, the detective story must place its crimes among credible people and in real places. Inspector French performs in a real English landscape (and how dull it is!). The London of Sherlock Holmes is the most convincing picture we have of London in the eighties. The Los Angeles region looks and feels and smells like Raymond Chandler's *The High Window* and *The Lady in the Lake*, and not at all like its image in the movies. (In fact, the movies usually refrain from picturing the real Hollywood at all for fear of dissipating its glamour.)* To anyone who has lived there, the France of Inspector Maigret is of a heart-rending accuracy. It is the excellence of its descriptions and of its evocations of other places that makes the detective story so loved. It has become the literature, not of escape, but of travel.

Nevertheless, when a writer attempts to describe something he can do it only in terms the reader is already familiar with. An inhabitant of New York, told that New Mexico is mountainous, thinks of the Alleghenies. He cannot do otherwise if those are the only mountains he has seen. But New Mexico is nothing like that, and there is no way at all of telling him in words what it is like. For the writer

* Now that movies are no longer made there, Hollywood often appears on the screen.

can never make the reader see something he does not already know; he can only regroup in the reader's mind memory images that are already there. On the other hand, description is what the painter does best. He can present the image directly and not through the distorting glasses of a reader's memory, not in meager and imprecise metaphors but in actual re-creations of light and air and color and mass. The painter has been trained to see, and it is always a surprise, even to other painters, how accurate his seeing is. Provence looks like Cézanne's picture of it, the Bahamas like Winslow Homer's, the Ile de France like Monet's, and Paris, even today, like the pictures in the Carnavalet Museum that Hubert Robert painted of it in the eighteenth century. People who have been there say that Chinese landscape looks like Chinese painting (and I am sure it does), and that Japan looks like Japanese prints. Spanish noblemen must have looked like El Greco's portraits and later like Goya's. The Venetian whores must have looked like Titians. Each valley has its dæmon, each race its type. The painter puts them all down.

No one has ever seen anything at all until the painter actually has invented it. Geometrical perspective was not a part of the people's vision until the painters of the fifteenth century began to paint it. It is not a part of people's vision today in the two thirds of the world unaccustomed to the conventions of Western painting. Objects probably

did not even look solid until painters showed them that way. Shadows on snow did not learn to be blue until around 1870, under the instruction of the impressionists, although Leonardo knew about it as early as 1500. To explain the paucity of color words in the works of Homer, where even the sky is not called blue, it has been supposed that the Homeric man (like our contemporary dog) was color-blind. However, if the Homeric Greeks were color-blind, it is more likely to have been the result, not of defective vision, but of an incomplete education and because the painter of those times with the few and probably dull pigments he had at his disposition had been unable to point out to his public which colors to see.

A whole literature of escape to the South Seas was built on the Polynesian beauty first seen by Gauguin in Tahiti. The Yankee whalers used to have a very good time there, and Melville even speaks of the natives as beautiful. But these islanders were envisaged as classical, if dusky, nymphs, and not as the broad-faced and serene beauties whose actual appearance was such a disappointment to our men in the Pacific area, brought up, as they were, on Dorothy Lamour. Even photographers can only photograph things that resemble pictures they have seen. The concept they have in their minds of what a picture is, is, naturally enough, something a painter has once painted. Remember how the early photographic portraits, with their

even lighting concentrated on the face, their dark backgrounds, and their pyramidical compositions, resemble the painted portraits of the thirties and forties. The Civil War photographs of Brady are modeled on the battle pictures he was familiar with. In our own day the photographs of Cartier-Bresson would be impossible without the painting of Christian Bérard, with whom, I have been told, he at one time studied. And the photographs of Walker Evans and his friends resemble in every way their model, the realistic school of painting which in the decades after the war explored the tawdry picturesqueness of the American slums.

The painter teaches everyone to see. His is the first and most complete description of our ever-changing world. He is a civilizing agent as well, for description and civilization are almost the same thing. Once an unknown thing has been described, it can be catalogued, compared with similar or different things, used, found again if lost, replaced if destroyed. It is named. As every student of applied magic knows, to summon or cast out a devil you must first name and thus limit him. So now the devils are limited by being named, they can be driven out, and the unknown place or thing becomes part of the world we live in. In fact, a civilization exists and functions and continues in its own identity only in so far as it has been described to itself and others. If a civilization has been well described, it knows both what it is and what it wants

to continue to be, and it can educate its young with that model, its own description, in mind. That is why, in many ways, France never changes, why, in the Emperor Julian's time, Paris was already known as a center for perfumes and furs, why the letters Mozart wrote from Paris tell about the same people I have encountered there myself. This continuance of tradition, this civilization, is one of the things the painter can help accomplish. And there have been no major civilizations, at least none that we know of, that have not had their poets, sculptors, and painters busy describing and recording what its people had on their minds.

Civilized places have always been well described. But in some of them the visual arts have been especially encouraged. Let us call such places the painting centers. It is there where the arts are taught, the market prices established, where there are more painters and sculptors at work than elsewhere. To the painting center the hinterland sends its young to learn art, its money to buy pictures. Everywhere else except the painting center, the painter thinks of as the provinces. For it is only in the painting center that communication between painters is good, and that all painters can know at once what is going on in painting. Athens was a center at one time for sculpture. Byzantium, Florence with its surrounding hill towns, the Netherlands, Venice, and Paris were centers for painting. Spain

has always been a province. However fine Spanish pictures are, there were never enough painters painting in one place—six or seven major ones are not enough—and these painters themselves mostly learned to paint elsewhere. (El Greco learned to paint in Venice. Goya went to Rome at 23. Velázquez did not get to Italy until he was 30 and Zurbarán did not get there at all, but the masters of both learned their art abroad.) England has always been a province. Except for the work of a few, such as Reynolds, Constable, and Turner, English painting has always been naïve, like Blake, or done by foreign masters, like Holbein or Van Dyck, or under foreign influence, like Gainsborough. We ourselves have always been a province, and all of our great figures—Copley, Homer, Audubon, and the rest—have been the outposts of the great European tradition that, since Venice and the Netherlands, has always centered around Paris.

A painting center is a place where much painting is bought and sold and where many painters live and work—where there is a demand for all kinds of painting. Consequently, in a painting center the painter's training becomes complete and he learns to do all the difficult things. Florence in the fifteenth century was like that. If you wanted to learn to paint (and a great many energetic youngsters did—it was a good life), you were apprenticed to a master, who taught you his trade and sold your work as his own until you took

your examination and became yourself a member of the guild. The examination consisted of painting a picture that met guild requirements. Guild requirements were so high that even today the word "masterpiece," which only means the picture by which you passed your entrance examination to the guild and got the right to be called "master," is confused with the word "chef d'oeuvre," which means the finest picture of all your work.

In a painting center there was much competition. The painter himself had to know everything connected with his trade. If there was something he did not know, he could easily find out about it from someone who did. Great quantities of painting were sold and exported. The more pictures sold, the more the public interested itself in painting. The greater became the public interest, the more pictures got sold. The public interest aroused in painting spread to all the kindred fields, to a huge body of artists and artisans of all sorts—architects, furniture makers, dress designers, decorators, weavers, embroiderers, scene painters, gardeners, and so on, all profiting by the prosperity of the painter and utilizing his visual discoveries.

Most painting centers have been rich commercial cities. Perhaps the free and easy give and take of commerce is more congenial to the painter's necessary liberty of mind than is the stricter protocol of administration and government. However this may be, to become a painting center a city must,

at any rate, begin by being rich. Florence was well-to-do before Giotto. She was conveniently located at the head of navigation of the Arno. She was a center for the wool trade. Her bankers had had the luck or foresight to side with the Pope in his quarrels. But many cities now are poor that once were rich. Money is a fugitive pigment. Art is its only fixative. The painters confirmed Florence's prosperity. Today, five centuries later, Florence has little wool trade. The Arno is no longer navigable. The papal bankers live in New York. Nevertheless, Florence remains a rich city. And had she been even more severely bombed during the recent war, tourists would still visit her, still admire and pay to see the memories of her paintings and the standing walls of her ruins. Paris, too, founded her prosperity on river traffic. She will maintain it on painters. For when commerce declines, a city can remain prosperous and remembered only in the measure that it was a capital of art.

There is a pretty example of how the painter stimulates commerce in the way night clubs and summer resorts follow his wanderings. Here, of course, it is not the painter's visual knowledge and his seeing eye, but his carefree night life and his search for paintable subject matter that opens up the slums to the *viveurs* and the countryside to summer visitors.

The painter, along with the students of the other arts, is likely to live in a poor section of town.

As Gertrude Stein remarked, when the light goes bad he will wander out to the neighborhood *bistro* for a drink. His working day is over. He has not a care, for his conscience goes with the light. Consequently, until it is time for him to go to bed, he has a very pleasant evening indeed. The news of his pleasures gets around and others come to share them. Presently his low-rent district is filled with night clubs, dance orchestras, "American" bars, whores, pimps, and limousines. The rents go up and the painter goes elsewhere. But he has left behind him a night-club section. Montmartre was started like that: in Picasso's youth there were actually painters living up on that hill. Later they moved to the Montparnasse section. When I left Paris in 1939 the night clubs had taken over Montparnasse and the painters were almost all gone. Greenwich Village during the other war became the home of painters who could not go abroad. Now there are few painters left: the rents are too high. But there is everything else one could possibly want at night. In New Orleans the other day, I passed a bar packed to its gurgling gills with music and the armed forces. It was named "Café des Artistes."

When spring comes and it is warm enough to work out of doors the painter goes to the country. But he cannot go to just any country. It must be a country where the landscape is both paintable and habitable. He cannot camp on the edge of a

precipice for the view, or do pack-mule explorations of the desert. Painting itself is hard enough work without the extra complications of a difficult home. As Degas said, painting is not a sport. The painter must find himself a paintable landscape adorned with a small hotel or farmhouse where he can stay, and where the food is eatable and the people friendly. He makes it his business to discover these amenities. Soon he is followed to his retreat by other painters, and then by painting students and people who like to live near the practice of the arts, and finally by the vacationist. So that in the end, his "Landscape with Habitation," passing through the state of "Artist Colony," has become "Summer Resort."

However, this is only the painter's summer life. In the winter he goes home to a painting center. For it is there that painting can be done. A painter living alone in the provinces, away from his fellows, will be able to solve almost none of the major problems of painting. He will exploit a minor personal mannerism under the mistaken belief—uncorrected by the presence of other painters—that he is making technical discoveries. His painting will become what is known as "naïve"—detailed, precious, and overexplicative—precious because the exploitation of a personal mannerism is a form of self-indulgence, detailed and overexplicative because the painter is afraid that to his provincial pub-

lic, which is unaccustomed to painting, what he is putting down might not be completely clear. The serious problems of painting he will not be able to attack, for they are too many and too hard for any one man, and their complete solution cannot ever be attempted except in a painting center where there are traditional knowledge and many painters. Even there, the most difficult of all problems, the problem of the big picture, with landscape, architecture, still life, figures, animals, and a real subject, cannot be resolved without constant and continuous work at it by everybody. This big picture—this mural painting—is an expensive luxury. It costs more in time, money, training, and materials than all the other sorts of painting put together. Consequently, mural painting can be done successfully only in a rich world where there is a painting center. Mural painting flourished in Italy, not much in England or in our country. At times when there are not many painters around, or when the world gets poor, mural painting disappears. Or, if it must be done, it can only be done at all by using trick solutions to the painting problems instead of legitimate ones based on real experience—by substituting stylization for invention. And when you see on a wall great sweeps of smooth outline and cylindrical limbs in skin-tight clothes, you may be sure the painter had insufficient training or that his world was poor.

If in a poor world the painter cannot do murals, in a poor world the sculptor cannot do anything at

all. In a poor world the painter still can paint. Painting materials do not cost much, pictures can be rolled up out of sight and out of the way, and the painter is not obliged to live in a fancy studio. But sculpture, even small sculpture, comes high. Sculpture (almost as much as the sculptor) occupies space, needs shelter, and must pay rent. With the few statues he and his fellows can afford to make, the sculptor cannot learn his trade. Just as no painter can solve a problem in one picture, no sculptor can solve a problem in one statue. Problems must be solved by doing them over and over again in all possible ways and different examples. A poor world cannot afford all this statuary: the traditions of sculpture get lost almost at once. In our time Rodin was the last sculptor who knew how to do everything. Since his time sculpture has threatened to become stylized. In practice, stylization is a way of avoiding the major problem of seeing and of making visible to others what has been seen. It attempts, instead, the easier problems of neatness and of resemblance to models of past but still fashionable styles. Thus it is able to make the product seem more professional, less clumsy and unschooled, with a smaller expenditure of effort.

However, in a rich world where there is a painting center, neither the painter nor the sculptor faces this necessity. Both of them know their trades. The sculptor is not driven to stylization; what the

painter can do on a small canvas he can do even better on a large wall. He does it over and over again, Giotto upon Cimabue, Mantegna upon Masaccio, Signorelli upon Castagno, as our bombs have discovered on the walls of many an Italian church. And since the live human skin is more interesting than the brightest surface of any dead machine, painting becomes all about people. Across the walls of public buildings and private homes, for all the world to see, parade the models and examples of human grace and dignity, and all the world does see and is ennobled by the discovery that mankind is an admirable race.

That is not now. Our world is not rich. Our necessities are difficult to get, our luxuries unobtainable. We talk a great deal of the luxury of our bathrooms and of our automobiles, forgetting that when the air is full of sulphurous acid and greasy soot, a bathtub is not a luxury, but a necessary instrument of health (Paris in the eighteenth century was muddy, but it was not black) and that with present-day city planning and congested transportation, to own an automobile is more important to most people than to own a bed. (Who has not seen, sitting beside the farmer's pathetic hovel, his black and shining car?) Leisure, quiet and easy communication, the necessary circumstances for creative work, are out of reach of all but a very few. Even the fruit of creative work is seldom available to us unless it has been deformed

for mass appeal or standardized for mass consumption. Our foods are patent, our bread uneatable, our wine Coca-Cola. No one has any time because he must use it going elsewhere. We have for our church the movie palace, for our high altar the juke box, for our communion of saints the radio, and for our Holy Ghost a word from our sponsor. We live in a poor world indeed.

However, the world has not always been poor. Nor will it always remain so. When the world was rich, the bulwark of its civilization, the arbiter of its taste, the crown and preserver of its prosperity was the painter. He will be all of these things again. I do not believe that even the painter himself understands his own importance. It is enormous. He sees for the whole world. Every harmony of color, every pleasant shape you use every day is there because some painter once discovered it. Every grace of feature or form or gesture you can see, you recognize because some painter once pointed it out. And though it is God Himself who is constantly inventing and re-creating the world, it is the painter to whom He shows it first and who delivers the new model to His public.

CHAPTER 3

His Subject Matter

"If that paint is waterproof, how much will you charge to paint a pretty girl on my tire cover?"

ALABAMA MOTORIST

THERE is a curious phenomenon of modern times that always surprises me when I encounter it. Ask any educated layman to describe a painting to you. He will tell you at great length about the picture's composition, its style, its influences and school, its color, manner, feeling. In the end he will have told you everything there is to know about the picture, except what it is a picture of. That he may not even remember. But if you ask a painter about a picture, he will tell you first of all its subject. For the subject is what he himself has on his mind when he paints his own picture.

There are very few things he can paint. He can

make a picture by painting inanimate objects, or a view, or animals, or human beings with or without clothes, or a combination of any or all of these things. These are the basic elements out of which pictures are made: animate objects, inanimate objects, and landscape. There is nothing else.

But these basic pictorial elements are not the subject matter for the painter's picture. His subject matter is rather the anecdote he tells, the subject he discusses, the sentiment he depicts, with the infinite possible arrangements and treatments of this basic material. Consequently, there are more subject matters for painting than you can count. Anything will serve—theology, people, heaven and hell, kings, knights, gods and goddesses, the sea, battles, magic spells, patriotism, family life, theatrical scenery, Roman history, gems from the poets, elegance, fashion, grandeur, despair, sex, obscenity, satire, love, and so on, until we get to the subject not the least in importance today—the simple evocation of some other pictorial style.

The choice of subject matter is seldom the painter's right. Painters have clients who sometimes buy pictures. Consequently, the choice of subject matter is either made by an actual client or taken by the painter with a possible client in mind. Somebody orders a *Last Supper* or the painter thinks that a *Cow in Field* will sell. At times when the painter's training is complete, he does not much care what his subject is, so long as the final judg-

ment of his part of the work is left to his own professional body. For, believe it or not, painters, malicious as they are likely to be about each other, actually know about painting. No one else does. And when professional judgment gets into the hands of a foreign group, like the women's clubs, or a ring of dealers and critics, or a senate subcommittee, very unpleasant things are likely to happen to the art.

So the client chooses the subject and the painter executes it and everything is fine. But how good the execution will be depends a great deal on how seriously the subject matter can be taken by both the painter and the client. There are four possibilities.

If the client believes in the subject but the painter does not, no great harm can come of it. For although the painter will not have the patience to waste his best work on what he considers a shoddy idea, nevertheless he will find, to keep himself amused while he paints, as a parallel subject for his picture, a private joke at his client's expense. And although the picture will turn out full of sly jibes and references, it will nevertheless get painted. For there is nothing in the setup to keep the painter from painting a perfectly good picture. The subject has become a subject like any other, and the fact that it appears inane to the painter simply means that he does not take his client seriously. But his picture he can take as seriously as he will, and there is nothing at all to

prevent his painting, and painting well, what he is actually at work at—a picture made up of animate objects, inanimate objects, and landscape.

If the painter and client both take the subject seriously, everything is for the best. Watteau once made a sign for the shop of his picture merchant. His merchant's intentions and his own were both perfectly clear. Both actually liked and believed in the merchandise for sale. The sign came out as one of Watteau's best pictures. For he was able to employ on the adornment of the idea all his talent and power and fancy.

This unity of intention on the part of the painter and the client is a characteristic of all the times that are known as the great periods of art. In such times both the painter and the client believe in the painter's subject and both work together to make its explanation as clear and its execution as worthy as they are able. Both the Greeks and their sculptors believed that youth and the human body were admirable in every way, and that the gods are made in the image of man. Both the Chinese and their artists believed that their gods were civilized beings. Everyone in the Western world up to the time of the Reformation believed in the nobility of Christ and the dignity of His church. All this is evident in all the art that these times produced.

If neither the painter nor the client can believe in the subject, the picture will come out sketchy or trite. Let us suppose that an advertising artist is

asked to paint a family of well-to-do Americans looking like British aristocrats because they are dressed in the garments for sale by the painter's client—a manufacturer of men's wear. This happy, horsy family is a fake. Both the painter and his client know it. Consequently, the painter will have neither the patience nor the time, nor will he be paid enough, to employ on his picture the full resources of the art of painting, as Watteau could do before him. Neither will the client spend more money than he is obliged to, to have a silly picture, nor will the painter waste more time than he must to make one. The most elaborate picture a painter can produce under these circumstances is an engaging sketch if he is talented, or an imitation of yesterday's virtuoso painting style if he is not.

The worst situation of all occurs when the subject is one that the painter himself can take seriously but one in which the client himself does not believe. Now the painter is in a sorry fix indeed. He cannot deal with his client man to man. He cannot find out what his client actually has on his mind. For the client does not know what he wants; he is ordering, not what he himself would like, but what he hopes will please someone else—usually a public to whom he in his turn is selling something. In this case, it is impossible for the painter, through the barriers of his client's timidity and censorship, to have any real contact with that completely artificial construction which the client thinks of as

the public. Consequently, the painter can have no freedom of movement. He must hold himself back. He cannot know how far he may go and not offend, just where he might tread on a gouty toe. He is afraid to paint according to his vision; he must play safe. He becomes overcareful. Because he fears to give offense, he timidly imitates some model that has pleased in the past, and his work becomes spineless and oversweet. To replace the missing vigor he is likely to employ the formulas supposed to give "strength"—sharp angles and brutal lines—and to please his uncertain client and his client's perplexing public, the stylizations derived from a less devious age. So that, if one thinks of the ecclesiastical art of today, of our stained glass windows imitated from Munich or from the Gothic, and of their saints and angels with their inane faces, of the shrines and altarpieces done in the most lugubrious mingling of the neo-Byzantine and the neo-modern, and if one remembers the marvels that were done in the past to celebrate this august company of heaven, one is led to suspect that the art ordered by the churches today is not so much for the glory of God as for His publicity.

You see, the dangerous cases come when there is doubt about the client's sincerity. This is the whole problem of commercialism in art. It arises every time the client does not know his own mind, or when the painter must please a client who in turn must please another. However, even in these dif-

ficult cases, from the client's point of view, the job gets well enough done. Advertising art does sell clothes. Quartier Saint-Sulpice saints can be prayed to. Which is, after all, all that was intended, although perhaps not entirely satisfactory from the point of view of art. Painting has always been used for propaganda: the aggrandizement of kings, the glory of the church, the teaching of the rules of behavior—how to be good or pay taxes or what to buy. That use of the art offends nobody, as long as the painter is allowed to do his own job well, which is the discovery and the depiction of the visible world. But that job he cannot do if he cannot dominate his subject, if he stands in awe of his client, or if his client does not know his own mind. For then the painter cannot properly execute his picture. Either the painter is unable to use his full powers on his subject, or he tries too hard to please his client, or he simply goes blind. That is what is the matter with royal and millionaire portraits today. The painter no longer has support from his guild; his client's glory awes him; he is dazzled and cannot see. The portrait will come out bad in direct proportion to the social interval between the painter and his sitter. This social gap can almost be said to be the subject of the picture.

In former times there was not this difficulty. The client knew that a painter who was an accredited member of his guild was an authority on seeing—that what the painter saw was what the

world looked like. Even the royal client submitted to this authority. And just as he now accepts the verdict of his physician, he generally accepted the portrait the painter made of him as a true resemblance—because the painter had behind him the support of his guild. If a client wished to refuse a picture he had commissioned, if he was not satisfied with a portrait he had ordered, the picture he questioned was first submitted to a court made up of members of the painting profession. If this guild court decided that the painting was not up to guild standards, the client could refuse to pay for it. If the guild decided that the work was good, its decision would be upheld by the civil courts. Thus the painter was protected against the vagaries of a capricious client and was able to face the most imposing sitter, not as an inferior member of the sitter's own social class, but as a man secure in his situation as master in a profession that was as absolute in its own domain as any feudal aristocracy.

Nowadays, without the support of his guild, the painter of the great is in a very uneasy seat. He has all the excessive amiability of the insecure guest. He must continually prove to himself and to his client that they are social equals. Which of course he cannot, for it is not necessarily true. The only way he can save his pride is either to charge so much money for his work that his client is impressed—in which case the painter is himself awed by his prices and becomes overmeticulous, or he

must develop a contempt for the human race in general and for clients in particular, in which case the painter becomes an unhappy man. One has only to compare a portrait by Titian and one by Lazlo to know that all this is true.

It is easier not to be awed by a client or impressed by a job when there are plenty of jobs around, and when the profession maintains its sovereignty by being itself the final judge of painting. (Imagine a doctor submitting an operation to a jury of patients!) But when jobs are few and painters quarrel and there is no guild support, any commission is an embarrassment. Almost any subject that is ordered is impressive, dazzling, disturbing to the painter's peace of mind; the fact that it has been ordered makes the painter more concerned with pleasing his client than with painting his picture, and the execution of his picture goes bad. What the painter needs is an undisturbing, an emotionally neutral subject matter, one that gives him no opportunity or temptation for pleasing, serious enough for him to be able to use on it all of his skill, important enough for any client to believe in, but a subject which neither the painter nor the client finds unduly impressive. With a subject of this sort, if he can find one, the painter's troubles are over, for then he can reduce all of his problems to the one he actually knows about—the problem of painting the essential pictorial elements—animate objects, inanimate objects, and landscape.

Now what is an undisturbing, a neutral, subject matter? Certainly not anything a client can order. For the purity of our clients' motives has become very suspect. The advertiser does not believe in the product, the sitter wants to be made seductive. The Church no longer glorifies God. So that neither the advertisement nor the portrait nor the altarpiece offers a neutral subject matter. Here are three subjects eliminated. A subject may be neutral to the painter but not to the client, might embarrass the client with innuendos or impertinent references. So almost any picturization of poetry or politics for private use is out. It might involve the client in the participation in an outmoded fashion or in the membership in an unfashionable party. Today's greater sexual liberty is accompanied by a greater personal reticence. No one wants to be compromised. So, gone as a subject is the nude—only to be hung on the wall if it is an old master. In which case the emotions aroused by the contemplation of its market value outweigh the implications of its nakedness. Gone too is the single clothed figure, the unnamed portrait. It might make someone suspect that the client had been to bed with the model and was presenting her, out of regard for public appearances, in a more seemly, if perhaps less seductive, garb. The landscape as a subject is still possible. But only if it could not be supposed that the client had been there on his vacation and had brought the picture back as a touching souvenir of a pleasant

summer. The still life—bottles and candles and books, all the paraphernalia of the school of Chardin—is suspect. It smells too much of the academy. It might lead someone to suspect that the owner of the picture had a friend who was an art student. There are, however, other subjects for still life—lilies, for instance, or apples and bananas (which, I have been told, are indeed its only basic subject matters). If our still life follows one or the other of these schools, if it suggests the organs of generation, and hence is impersonally scandalous and not personally involving, the most fastidious client can hang it on his wall without shame. For in this case the still life has become a part of the mythology of Freudian sex, which along with the evocation of the history of art, are now the only subject matters left in the world that are absolutely neutral to both painter and client.

Freudian symbolism can implicate no one. It is too generalized and too quaint, like the hell of Hieronymus Bosch, where no one can imagine himself going. The history of painting styles is also completely impersonal. It involves only an academic detachment, an Olympian evaluation of the past, and implies on the part of the client only cultivation and education, both honorific things. And although Freudian symbolism was originally employed with politically subversive intentions, and the history of painting styles has ended up in stock-market manipulations, as subjects neither

compromises the buyer nor involves him in any party line. Both are reasonably pure. The one has become the subject of the surrealist, the other of the abstract picture. Neutral subject matter and modern art are almost the same thing.

I have not insisted enough on the difference between a subject that is neutral for the painter and one that is neutral for the client. A subject is neutral for the painter when it does not disturb his peace of mind, interfere with his seeing, or make more difficult (by emotional involvement, by promises of success or money, or in any other way at all) his depiction of the basic pictorial material—animate objects, inanimate objects, and landscape. A subject is neutral for the client when it does not compromise him, is not sexually or socially involving, and does not do any one of the numberless things that would render the picture unhangable or embarrassing to have around. In a picture painted today, if it is to be both well executed and acceptable, both neutralities are absolutely essential. Of older pictures, we do not require both. All that is necessary is that at the time the picture was painted, its subject shall have been neutral for the artist. Because a picture of a certain age, in a certain state of preservation, in the right frame, by a known master or school, may be a picture of anything and still be completely respectable. It is an Old Master. And its actual subject, which can cause only pleasure and envy and

elation in the breast of the beholder, is how much money it is worth.

As you can see, subject matter is a very important thing to the painter, for it is its subject matter that enables the first sale of a picture to take place. And since it is from the first sale of his work that the painter derives his income, he is frequently tempted by the few subject matters, neutral or not, for which there is always a market.

I was once told, and it is perfectly true, that nobody who can play the piano or draw a likeness will ever starve. This minimal talent of the two professions assures a sort of livelihood. And in the same way, as far as painting is concerned, both portraiture and advertising offer the painter subject and subsidy. However, as I have already pointed out, both advertising and portraiture have lately fallen into disrepute and neither of them is as respectable or as well done as in former times, when the church bought the painter's allegories and the guild endorsed his portraits. Most painters, nevertheless, do a certain amount of either advertising or portraiture. But they are liable to get into trouble if they abandon neutral subject matter and the jury of their peers, to become advertising artists or portrait painters.

As I have pointed out before, advertisers do not really believe in the excellence of their products. The subjects they offer to painters are trivial. Na-

ture as seen through an apple, or conviviality as seen through a *Last Supper*, is a serious enough subject to accept all the labor and skill and love a painter can use to adorn it. But Tutti-Frutti Ice Cream, as a subject, is both trivial and limiting. A trivial subject can only be treated in a frivolous manner. When the late Grant Wood elaborated with his astonishing technique and talent such trifling anecdotes as his picture of Parson Weems recounting the story of George Washington and the cherry tree—more what we are accustomed to see on the cover of the *New Yorker* than subjects worthy of so serious a painter—the results were lamentable. His talents overpowered his subjects. His labor rendered the jokes sad. The advertising artist, dealing with a more trivial subject than even these, dares not use more than part of his skill on his theme. He cannot allow himself to take it seriously. Besides, working as he does under a deadline, he has no time to. Mostly he works from memory and imagination, which is quicker and considerably easier for him than working from life. He cannot take time off to refresh himself by the study of nature any more than he can allow himself to vary his style. Because what he has for sale must be like what he has sold in the past. After seven or eight years of it, he is worn out and out of fashion. He never comes back in. And although while he is in fashion, his fabulous income tempts his fellow painters to do as he does, once he is out

of fashion he cannot earn another penny and he is no longer even an artist.

The subject matter of a portrait is the resemblance. That is what is ordered by the sitter or his family. But everybody has a great many resemblances. His resemblance changes with every light and mood, according to whether he is in love or digesting his food, whether he is flushed with exercise or with wine, or is well or sleepy or ill. I am sometimes tempted to believe that the very bones of the skull themselves are flexible and change from day to day. Even a death mask or a cast taken from the living face is not a final, absolute resemblance. For the cast is taken from the supine head and the weight of the plaster pushes the flesh back toward the ears and gives a likeness that is drawn and tight. The two sides of any head are completely different in both proportion and expression. A slight change in hair-do or in make-up will change the accentuation of a face, emphasize different features, and consequently give a different resemblance. So the possible resemblances attached to one person are almost numberless and the one he chooses to recognize as his own depends on the fashions and admirations of the time and place he lives in, and has to do with how it is considered proper for someone in his situation in life to look and to feel.

Unfortunately, nowadays few sitters know which resemblance they want, and most are reluctant to

accept the painter's choice. That makes the portrait painter's job a difficult one. It is easier for the photographer. He can offer for selection a number of proofs, all different likenesses of the same person. The sitter chooses the one he would like to resemble, and he actually believes he looks like that.

A sleuth in some early detective story must have said (for it has a Holmesian flavor): "The camera does not lie." But however truthful the camera may be in detective fiction, in life it does not see the way that you and I do. Just as we ourselves must learn to interpret children's drawings, which are built on a system of perspective entirely different from the one we are accustomed to use, a savage tribe unacquainted with the uses of photography must be taught to interpret the photographic image. Our soldiers found this to be true when they attempted to make natives of the Solomons identify enemy ships from photographs. For the camera sees in two dimensions, in a point-by-point correspondence to the object, in a false perspective engendered by the short focal length and wide visual angle of its lens, with an untrue translation of colors into black and white and gray, and that in a very limited range. It sees instantaneously—only what is happening during the fraction of a second when the shutter is open. If the camera is loaded with color film, what comes out in the photograph to correspond to the color of an object is a matter of complete chance. It depends on the color process

used, the length of exposure and the method of development. And although in a successful color photograph a green will sometimes photograph green, a red red, and a blue blue, these will never be the green and the red and the blue that the eye sees in the object, but will be only pleasant enough symbols for these colors, symbols that can never—even if a perfect set of primary dyes were available—approach the variety or intensity of the hues the eye perceives in nature.

You and I, to the contrary, see with the memory as much as with the eye, in three dimensions, in colors that are accepted as what the real colors of the object are, in the perspective natural to a lens of very long focal length and very narrow visual angle. Our eye, moving swiftly and continually over the object, creates, with the aid of our memory, the impression of a very wide field of vision that we do not have at any one instant of time. Each time we see an object we superimpose the present image on all the other images of it that we have already stored up in our memory, and we see all the images at once. So that you and I use in our seeing, a fourth, or time, dimension as well. The painter sees with his memory a little less than the citizen; part of his training as a painter has been to learn how to disassociate the image he is seeing now from the images he has seen in the past—to see with an “innocent” eye, only what he is actually looking at. If you consider all this, it

becomes quite evident that the eye and the camera are not at all the same. What the painter sees—not what the camera sees—is what the world looks like. And contrary to popular opinion, a number of portraits of a person, done by different painters who all have the gift of portraiture, will differ less among themselves than a number of photographs of that person, taken by the same camera, but at different times.

The fact that the painter has been trained to see an object at the time when he is actually looking at it is the cause of one of the difficulties a portrait painter always has with his sitter's family. The painter sees the sitter as he is now. The family remembers the sitter as he looked some time ago. They still see him like that, and it is always a painful shock and a cause of dissatisfaction to them how "old" his portrait looks. Later they invariably say that the sitter has grown to look like his portrait, which only means that their stock of memories of what the sitter looked like has caught up with yesterday's likeness, and now includes the portrait. The fact that most people see with their memory a great deal more than they suppose explains why any portrait painted from a photograph, especially of the dead, is always said to bear such a surprising resemblance. Because memory fades, and the photograph remains and replaces it. And the person is remembered, not as he was at all, but like his photographic image. And that anyone can copy.

If the painter knows what likeness his sitter wants, his job is fairly easy. Great public and political figures know very well what they want to look like. It is part of their business to know. It is their trade-mark, their advertising slogan. It is practically impossible to miss. Anybody can paint it. I have never seen a portrait of Franklin D. Roosevelt that I was not sure was a spitting image, for all his portraits had the same resemblance. But which resemblance the ordinary sitter wants to think of as his own is much more difficult to divine. However, there are fashions in resemblances (such as how in Washington every man of a certain age manages to look like the current president), and what the sitter wants to look like and chooses to resemble is governed by fashion and changes enormously with his time and his place in society, as we can see in the portraits of other times. How competent and busy were the English lords and ladies of the time of Holbein! How grand and self-contained were the French at the court of Louis XIV! How good natured and charming they were under Marie Antoinette! How full-blooded and *terre-à-terre* they were as citizens of the First Republic! Our own resemblances nowadays are less interesting. Hollywood has imposed on us all the most insipid of likenesses. Everybody wants to look charming. Nothing could be duller for the painter. On the other hand, from some photographs I have seen of the celebrities of Mexico City,

I should imagine the fashion there to be somewhat different. A provocative and sensual insolence, combined with a certain Beethovenian grandeur of soul, seems there to be much in demand.

But all this—whether the sitter knows what he wants to look like or not, or if he does know, which likeness he demands—is a subject of painting like any other, and more acceptable than most. The danger to the painter is not there. It lies rather in the fact that the construction of the likeness is itself a form of magic, and like any other form of magic, very wearing on the person who constantly practices it. Getting a likeness has nothing to do with the technique of painting, even very little to do with the accurate representation in paint of the forms of the sitter's head. It is rather a form of caricature, of depicting character by accents. A person of strong character will make an interesting sitter, a beautiful but characterless person will not. People who know nothing at all about painting often do portraits quite well. Very good painters frequently cannot do them at all. It is a gift, a psychological trick, the result of establishing a certain sort of intimacy with the sitter, a form of magical domination. It is most certainly a magical relation. For if the sitter is ill or tired or has a cold, or comes drunk to the sitting, immediately his painted image will begin to look ill or wretched or tired or drunk, and do what he will, the painter cannot

prevent it. No one can tell you how to get a likeness—even the man who has done it all his life. When the likeness is coming well, no wry color, no false stroke, will keep it out. If it is going badly, the greatest care will not save it. It is a fascinating game. The sitter loves it and never wants the picture finished. But it leaves the painter exhausted and fit for nothing. Almost any competent painter can turn you out a likeness from time to time, and most of them do. But the painter who paints only portraits wanders away into the realms of sympathy and magic, loses contact with the professional world and the respect of his fellows. And since once the likeness is caught, the portrait is finished and his job is done, the painter who only paints portraits ends by not being able to paint anything else.

Animate objects, inanimate objects, and landscape—this is the alphabet out of which any picture is made, and what the painter spells out with it depends on what client he has at the moment. But whether his client buys family portraits or dining-room pieces, history of art or art for selling, propaganda or pornography, saints or psychology, he is actually buying none of these things at all. He is buying instead the image of the world that the painter sees. And since every eye and mind and hand is different, and since the visible aspect

of the world changes from day to day, and since the painter alone has learned to see it, the more commonplace and trite and comfortable his image will have seemed to the painter, the more extraordinary, shocking, and new will it appear to everybody else.

CHAPTER 4

His Training

"There is a man in Rossville who can paint rings around you. But he's had lessons."

YOUNG LADY IN ARKANSAS

THERE is, and as far as I know there never has been, but one training for the painter. And that is drawing from the nude. Life-class drawing is the only thing that can be taught in school. It is, indeed, the only thing for which there is any proper schooling at all. And it is the one thing that, without exception, every painter learns. The naked human body is of all objects the most subtle and the most difficult to draw. The slightest mistake in its rendering is immediately apparent, even to the untrained. And it is, most certainly to the young and usually to everybody else, the most continuously and passionately interesting of all possible

subjects for study, adding as it does, to the austerities of instruction, the luster of the human skin. The problem put to the student is that of delineating on a standard sheet of paper about eighteen by twenty-five inches in size, as accurately and as straightforwardly as he can, the forms and proportions of the model who is posed on a platform in the middle of the class. The figure is drawn as large as the paper will allow, and in charcoal, which is easy to erase and which completely lacks any misleading charm of tone. Charm or beauty of any sort is out of place. We are learning to draw, not trying to please, and the drawings are not to be sold. The models are of all sorts, but usually not pretty. The old and the fat ones are the best; being without any misleading beauty or charm, they are easier to see and to draw.

I myself was never completely satisfied with any of the life classes I attended. They were generally held at night; the light on the model was always like the lighting in the pictures of Caravaggio—strong and directly over the model's head. The neck and lower surfaces of the standing knee were always in shadow, so it was years before I understood how they were constructed. And the poses were never of the right length—twenty minutes, which was too short, or five days, which was too long. The lighting and the length of pose differ somewhat in different life classes, but it is in classes like these that I and every other painter

for the last four hundred years, since the establishment by the Carracci of the academy at Bologna, have gone to school. Drawing from the nude in the life class corresponds, in learning to paint, to the study of the school fugue in learning to write music. Its rules are conventional and completely arbitrary. Its practice gives facility, ease in making our lines and smudges explain on paper the solid forms we are learning to see. And like the school fugue, no matter how tenderly we may remember it, it can never be used afterwards in our professional living.

What we are doing is not making drawings, but learning to see. It is a commonplace of the schools. For anything that can be visualized in three dimensions can be drawn. ("If you are puzzled by a form," says the instructor, pushing us up to the model, "run your hand over it.") The amount of skill necessary for signing your name will more than serve for putting the thing down on paper. And in learning to see we discover an entirely new world, the painter's own, a world of three dimensions existing entirely in the present, where objects have form and color and situation in space but no history, a world without snobbery, where everything that is has the importances of size and shape and position, but not of good or bad repute, where all things are morally equal and all have solid forms and occupy space and can be walked among and touched. We learn to see "pure," without the in-

trusion of words or symbols or memory, to see only what the eye is seeing at that moment and nothing more, to see, not in the convenient shorthand of the word, but in the actual lines and shapes and colors and forms whose concurrence summons that word before the mind.

When we were children we were told that the grass is green, that trees are green. As children we were also told that there are three primary colors—red, blue, and yellow—and that the complement of yellow is purple. All this is quite wrong. There are any number of primary colors; what they are depends on what pigments you have at your disposal. And what colors are complements depends on whether by color you mean pigments or colored lights. If you mean pigments, then yellow and purple are complements, and mixed together in the proper proportions will make gray (unless the pigment particles are practically opaque, in which case they are not complements at all, and their mixture will give a sort of red). If you mean by color colored lights, then the complement of yellow is blue. Because if you mix a yellow and a blue light, you will get a white light. To the eye—for we see with light, not with pigments—yellow and blue are directly opposite each other on the color circle. The colors between yellow and blue on one side of the circle have many names—orange, vermilion, red, scarlet, magenta, fuchsia, violet, purple. On the other half of the circle are just as

many colors. But we have only one name for them all, which is green. So to the beginner all these colors—one whole side of the color circle—are equivalent to just one word, and that word is equivalent to the paint in just one tube. He paints trees green and the result is appalling.

We were also told when we were children that a hand has four fingers and a thumb, that a head has a face and that a face has eyes, nose, and mouth. So the beginner will draw a head, perhaps quite well, and then he will write on it symbols for eyes, nose and mouth. And on the hand five fingers, and on the foot five toes. The result is very funny. But when he learns to see the features as they are, as forms and as the meeting places of planes, and learns to forget their names, he can draw them. Because learning to draw is the process of forgetting names, of unlearning, of acquiring an innocent eye.

That is drawing. That is the painter's complete schooling. For that is practically all his teachers can teach. But it is harder than it sounds. Everyone who wishes to paint must learn it. And the popular belief that it is no longer necessary to learn to draw to become an artist, that modern art got that way because the modern artists were unable to draw, is the exact contrary of the truth.

Drawing, painting, color, and composition are the four elements of a painter's training. The last three are most difficult. They cannot be learned in

school. They cannot be got out of books. They are not for sale. They must be learned from doing, from watching one's friends, from the work of one's predecessors, from copying pictures in museums, from painting pictures oneself. That is why it is easier to learn to paint in a painting center like Paris, where there are thousands of painters practicing their trade, than in Sarasota or Ann Arbor, where schools are perhaps better but painters few.

To learn painting, one must learn about edges and about paint quality. Good paint quality is a great luxury. Normally, a surface painted in oil paint has a heavy and ugly appearance. Oil paint has none of the natural charm of gouache, fresco, tempera, or pastel. A whitewashed wall is more agreeable to the eye than any painted plank. To get a pretty paint surface in oil is not easy. It takes layers of paint, many of them, one on top of the other, a sensitive hand to lay them down, and time for them to ripen. As any householder who has ever painted a porch chair knows, one coat of paint will not cover. Even the most opaque pigments, like vermilion or white lead, are somewhat transparent when they are ground in oil, and become more transparent as they get older. When the picture is dry—after six months or a year—all the paint layers in the picture unite into one mass. One color can be seen a little through the layer of color on top of it, and that through a third. When you look at the picture you are looking down into the paint.

The light has gone in, traveled around, and come back out you reflected and filtered by the different pigment particles at all the different depths of the paint films. The surface of the painting comes to life and the picture will change with every angle of view and with every change of light.

That is precisely what light does inside a rose petal. And that is one reason why with our brightest pigments we cannot imitate the color of a rose. If you extract the red pigment from a rose, it will turn out to be disappointingly dull and coppery. That brownish tinge is the surface reflection of the coloring matter itself. Almost every pigment has two colorations, depending on whether the light is going through the pigment or being reflected from its surface. Prussian blue powder looks bronze when it reflects the light, and gold leaf, looked through, is green. In the rose petal, however, there is little surface reflection. The pigment is in the cell walls, the light travels through them again and again. Each time more of the surface reflection is filtered out, and only the brightest red emerges to strike the eye.

This multiplicity of paint film is why no color print can possibly imitate a hand-painted oil, even if the paper is embossed, as I have seen in some beer signs, to imitate the strokes of the painter's brush. In a print the pigment is in the form of ink. It lies on the surface, has no depth, no life, does not move and change as does the painted picture. The colors

themselves are aniline dyes, some not even light-proof. So if you still wish to consider yourself a patron of the arts because you once bought and hung on your walls a set of color reproductions, do not compare them with the originals. Your prints have faded long ago.

Consequently a print cannot be said to have a proper paint quality. In fact it cannot be said to possess a paint quality at all. And the most awkwardly painted oil is certain to have a less dead surface than the most perfect color reproduction. Just as there are many number of recipes for baking a light cake, there are any number of ways of producing a live paint surface in a hand-painted oil—by superimposing transparent or semiopaque glazes on a heavy underpainting, by a rough surface of opaque brushwork that is itself a light trap, and others. There are as many different sorts of paint quality as there are painters. But no matter what formula you use, the result will not be good paint quality unless your hand is light. And that cannot be taught. You must learn it yourself by doing and watching. Of course, good paint quality is not really necessary in a picture. Many a fine picture has been turned out with almost no charm of surface whatever: Frans Hals had very little of it. Many pictures acquire it with age. But good pictures do generally have a good paint quality. A fine painter, like a good cook, is likely to have a light hand.

Edges are much more important. If you can paint edges, you can paint anything. Edges, in fact, are so important that the whole of Cézanne's painting technique was invented as a method of getting at them first. Edges are the lines on a canvas where things meet, where one form is in front of another or in front of a background, where one color abuts another. Varying the edges, losing and finding them, soft edges contrasted with hard ones, the presence or absence of outline, the misplaced outline, letting the light from a bright area spread over the outline into a dark area, painting the nearer edge on top of the farther one—all these are the elements of drawing in paint, means of creating depth and air and roundness. Edges may be pulled as hard and as tight as piano wires, as in Georgia O'Keeffe, or they may apparently be completely absent, as in Claude Monet. But unless the problem of edges is satisfactorily solved, the painting is not a picture, it is a poster. Because a hard unvaried outline lies on the surface of the canvas and pins the forms there, allows no depth or recession into the picture, and emphasizes the flat pattern of the design. Whereas a varied outline, by creating a certain small confusion in the eye as to the exact position of the objects in the picture, allows them to retreat within the picture's frame, and lets space and air into the picture. Present-day mural painters often stylize their edges and surround their figures with a sort of stiff wire cable under the pretext of

thus keeping their pictures flat on the wall. But I am of the opinion that they are making a virtue of a necessity and would not so treat their edges if they were skillful enough to do otherwise.

A sense of color is good to have but not really indispensable. Many a fine painter has had just enough of a sense of color to set himself a rule-of-thumb color system and be able to stick to it (like painting in grays, with perhaps a spot of vermilion somewhere in the picture to make it "sing," or eliminating from his palette the dangerous colors such as the lakes or the violets or the bright greens). No student, however, can say that he has or has not a color sense until he can manipulate his paints without effort, until, automatically, his brush comes up from his palette with the color he wants, which he does not remember mixing at all—just as the pianist only has to think a C-major scale and there it is. Until then the beginner cannot know whether he has a color sense or not. He has not the means to find out. But even if he does not have one, a satisfactory enough color sense can be acquired. How quickly the troublesome distinctions of "warm" and "cold" colors resolve themselves into hitherto unsuspected tones of buff and orange, blue and lavender, which the student has actually learned to see! Practice and use do the trick.

The higher reaches of color, however, are beyond any but the most gifted. Any color placed beside any other color is distorted and changed. Their

successful juggling is very hard to do. Delacroix said, that he could paint the skin of a Venus using only mud from a ditch if he were allowed to choose the surrounding tones. The felt on Van Gogh's celebrated billiard table looks bright emerald green. It is actually a dull sulphur yellow. I confess I do not know how it was done. I have even thought that it might have been painted in a fugitive pigment, Paris green, which has changed color. But this is probably not so; that the table appears the most brilliant green imaginable cannot be the result of an accident.

The curious optical illusions connected with color can be very useful to the painter. The eye is not a perfect optical instrument. A spot of red will appear to it to be nearer than a spot of blue. Objects in a picture can be made to appear very solid indeed by painting their retreating edges bluer or "colder" and their nearer parts redder or "warmer." It is possible to do this so subtly that the spectator is not aware of any color change at all. The illusion of air and space inside the picture can be got by spotting with different colors of the same relative darkness. The eye becomes dazzled and cannot be certain how far away the spots lie. Seurat and the pointillists made a system of this, using quite large spots. But the thing itself has been practiced, using smaller spots, ever since painting first began. You will even find it in the Græco-Egyptian funerary portraits.

There is another thing whose cause I do not know and whose effect cannot be predicted. Patches of different colors that match exactly in relative darkness, neither appearing darker than the other, at a distance of three feet from the eye, will often not match at all at twenty feet. Distance, as well, sometimes exaggerates quite small changes of relative darkness. These are perhaps the reasons why some pictures are incomprehensible at three feet and nevertheless read perfectly well from across the room, or will seem all right from close up, but spotty and ill-painted from farther away.

Artificial light from tungsten lamps, which is rich in yellow and poor in blue, completely changes the relation of the lights and darks in a picture. The yellow tones become lighter, the blue and violet tones darker. Some colors completely fade away. The brilliant Monastral green, a blue-green dye-pigment recently introduced, becomes twice again as brilliant, almost fluorescent, and is impossible to use if the picture is to be viewed by electric light. If the picture is painted in broken color (in the juxtaposition of spots of different colors that match in relative darkness), the spots will jump out like polka dots as soon as the light is turned on. If a picture is to be painted by electric light, or intended not to be seen except by it, the painter must leave off his palette the lemon yellows and the ultramarine blues, which become respectively almost completely white and black under tungsten light,

and limit himself to a range of colors from orange to the blue-green of viridian. Fluorescent daylight tubes are even more tricky and distort colors even more erratically. For they give the appearance of white light by the superposition of a mercury vapor arc on a white light. Under this illumination, any pigment that reflects much light in one of the intense regions of the mercury spectrum will appear much lighter, and the ones that do not, darker. However, most painters very sensibly pay no attention to all of this. Nor do they change their procedures to correspond with any system of artificial lighting, feeling that both they and the sun will continue to exist long after the disappearance of all these local electrical contraptions.

Composition comes last on the list, and composition is the whole art of painting. It is the problem of filling the canvas interestingly, of holding the spectator's attention by purely formal means. Composition is what I think Clive Bell meant by his equivocal "significant form." For composition is why you can remember a picture and anything you can remember is "significant." Attention to the niceties of composition is why Audubon is a great painter and Norman Rockwell is not. For whereas Norman Rockwell devotes his incredible skill for detail and drawing to the ornamentation of an anecdote, Audubon devotes his equally amazing skill to the clarification of a composition. To a painter, composition is what a painting is about.

And he will labor for years on the same composition, painting it and repainting it again and again in any number of pictures. A spectator need not know it is there, but a successful solution of the problem of composition is what makes the picture work.

A composition may be flat or three dimensional, lopsided or symmetrical, empty or crammed full. But it must feel right to everybody. There are innumerable systems and formulas for doing it: the Japanese occult balance—in which the full spaces are balanced against the empty spaces; the early German and Flemish system one finds in Dürer and Schongauer—in which all the vertical and horizontal and diagonal lines if continued through meet at the frame and lead one into the other and back into the picture; the “Greek” dynamic symmetry—in which the picture is contained in a network of the proportions of the square roots of two, three or five—proportions this system supposes to be the only beautiful ones; the Impressionists’ dictum that every square centimeter of the canvas must be independently interesting; the theory of the counterbalance of weights—that the masses of the objects in the picture, like the weights on a scale, must balance around some central point; the theory of the pyramid—that the central forms of a picture must resemble in their grouping that most stable of objects; the theory of the circulation in space around a central axis; the theory that composition is con-

cerned with the empty spaces between the objects and not with the objects themselves. (I remember a piece of sculpture that was guaranteed by its maker to divide any room in which it was placed into a pleasant composition.) There are many more systems of composition. They all work as long as they force the painter to watch intently the picture he is painting and to let the subject take care of itself.

A compositional system can be made on the basis of linear distortion. We all remember the optical illusion of the line that goes behind a pair of parallel lines at an angle and comes out apparently in the wrong place. Or of the two parallel lines that when they are crossed by other parallel hatchings appear bent. In the same way every line in a picture, even the edge of the frame, distorts and changes any line near it. The balance of these pressures and tensions can be used for balancing a composition. This was a favorite system of Cézanne's. In a picture the actual measurement is of no importance. It is the appearance that is the truth. To look straight, lines must be twisted out of place. That is why it is impossible for a painter to change radically any portion of his picture once the painting is well under way. He will never be able to get the distortions to balance again. It is much easier to start all over on a fresh canvas.

If a line goes behind a head of a portrait the whole head must be twisted and deformed. Otherwise it

will not look right. Most of the Renaissance painters avoided the difficulty by painting behind the head of a figure a neutral space—a sky, a column, or simply black. Modern clothes, with their intricate V's of collar and lapel and the geometrical *décolletage* of evening gowns, render portraiture very difficult. For all the lines of the costume lead to the sternum or to the Adam's apple and away from the head. So that present-day painters prefer to dress their sitters in sports clothes, where these lines can be avoided, as they cannot be in our more formal attire. The ruff of other times made portraiture simpler. It isolated the head and offered it, as if on a platter, to the painter or to the headsman.

Geometrical perspective is no longer a serious part of the painter's training. At the time when the painter was principally occupied painting large pictures to be seen from a distance, perspective was very necessary. For the rules of classical perspective offer an invaluable framework for large and spacious compositions. Perspective, however, only works when the eye is considered as fixed and at some considerable distance from the object. Nowadays the painter usually paints small pictures and from close up, and the rules of perspective do not work at all. If we are near an object, the parallax—that is to say, the difference we see in an object's position against a background when we look at the object first shutting one eye and then the other, or when we look at it from a slightly different point of

view—is very large. This means that when the painter paints from close up, he has two points of view—one for each eye—and two separate systems of perspective, and he must choose between the two for placing the lines on his canvas. Making the parallax even larger by moving about a bit does not hurt. We constantly move around; no one ever looks at anything with his eye glued to a peephole. Painting with a shifting point of view will sometimes make objects seem more convincing. Cézanne used this shifting point of view a great deal. It was further exploited in the early cubist paintings. Where objects lie in the picture is, for us today, more a matter of convenience and of composition than of any exact rules of perspective. Indeed, perspective has come to seem so odd today that the common type of advertising drawing with parallel lines converging to a vanishing point is now identified by the trade with what it thinks of as the oddest vagary of all and is called the “surrealistic” style.

To a working painter all this division of his art into categories of drawing, painting, color, and composition seems otiose. These are convenient divisions for learning. But once learned, the separate compartments do not exist. To the practicing painter, there is no such thing. He is not drawing or painting or coloring or composing. He is making a picture. Nevertheless, for the student these

subjects are all real and must be learned somewhere. When our ideal painting center is operating, the schooling is ideal as well. There is much painting to be done, more than the painter can manage without help; he takes in youngsters as aids and teaches them what he knows as quickly as he can. They are being paid for it; he is relieved of the tedium of the more mechanical parts. After a while the youngsters know as much as the master knows and they can set out for themselves. It is, you see, a circle; the more painting sold, the more painters; the more painters, the more competition; the more competition, the more interest there is in painting; and the more interest there is in painting, the more painting is sold. In the meanwhile the youngsters have become masters.

Today in a leaner world painting instruction is likely to be taken over by the academic bodies, the schools and colleges. They are pre-eminently unfitted for it. For they are capable of teaching only one thing that could not be learned more efficiently elsewhere—intercollegiate football. They import as a painting instructor a painter who, though he will have an enthusiastic student following, has nevertheless little academic standing. He is an instructor or an assistant at most, even though—poor man—he passes his vacations painting pictures he intends to submit as a thesis for a doctorate. (Imagine it, a Doctor of Oils!) He will have to teach, and in the end he will be fortunate if he does not actually

come to believe in the academic doctrine of the equal value of all styles. Which is this:

To the scholastic mind nothing can be a subject for learning or scholarship until it is in a book in a library. No painting style can be thus embalmed until it is thoroughly and completely dead, until it is no longer startling or offensive, until it can be easily recognized as a style of art, and until no one has any reason ever to work in it again or any ability to do so. So, to the scholastic mind, all styles are equal; all the styles it knows are equally dead, equally remote, and equally interesting. The style of today, since it has not yet been put in a book, it cannot know. This is an ominous thought for any painter, still breathing the air and going about his business, who has begun to receive serious attention from the professors.

The professor-painter takes a large point of view, teaches his students to paint in all the styles and tries it out himself. The things that he tells them over and over again he must himself eventually come to believe. So he poisons his own mind and undermines his own working ability. For creative work is done, not by being broad-minded and understanding everything, but by keeping the mind narrow and concentrating it on one problem, by doing that problem over and over again and again. And by not believing, while one is at it, that anything else is any good at all. (George Moore said of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, "They tell me he has

written a book in a number of styles. That can't be. Style is not variety. Style is monotony.")

The professor-painter has more than he can do. He is an artist in a small town. Consequently, he is the sole champion of the arts and must take up arms in defense of painters whose work he personally detests. He is the emissary of the great world of culture. Consequently just as the minister, the locum tenens for God, must preach in many a church, the professor-painter must speak before many a woman's club. He is the spokesman for the liberal point of view; he must defend the local labor unions. He is very busy. He is lucky if he is not made to paint the banners for the football games and the scenery for the dramatic society. What he teaches most easily in his classes is abstract art, that being now respectable on account of its supposedly more theoretical nature, its purer æsthetics, its distance from the vulgar and difficult necessity of drawing, and its rich relations who send it everywhere on tour, so nicely packed and well explained. He is surrounded by enthusiastic and talented students, who are with the greatest of difficulty restrained from entering upon a career for which there is not the slightest demand—their world being full of people who have such an admiration for Culture and for the Best that they would not think of buying and hanging on their walls anything but an example of the most internationally ad-

vertised art product. Which, of course, except in the form of a reproduction, they cannot afford.

A charming woman once said to me while I was painting: "My nephew used to do that. He drew and he drew and he drew, and he got so good at it that they gave him a job teaching. And now he doesn't have to draw any more."

The big art schools like the Art Students' League of New York are much better than that. They have painting and drawing from the model with weekly or biweekly criticism by successful working painters, who doubtless find their infrequent contact with youth stimulating and pleasant enough, and who are not forced to wear away the edges of their energies uncovering buried talents or processing nonentity. The students have a professional point of view; some even intend to earn their living by the practice of painting and, in fact, will. But all this is still not very satisfactory. There is no real necessity for anyone to teach or to learn anything. No one is using any of it in his actual living. The instructor is not using the student's work; the student is not getting paid for the work he does. So a great deal of time is wasted in the lunchrooms in discussions about æsthetics—which is mostly a sales talk invented by literary men to promote their friends' pictures, and should not concern the student or the working artist at all.

Better than all this is studying painting in Paris.

There the schools are bad. But it does not matter, for all your friends paint and sell pictures, and you can learn from them. In Paris great reputations are not impressive and no one is ever awed by them, because the great live just around the corner, are seen every day, and can even be known if there is any reason for it. There art criticism by art critics is acknowledged venal, but art criticism by fellow painters is sound. And no one ever utters a general æsthetic principle unless he knows from his own professional experience what he is talking about and is reading and willing to fight—as he often must—in its defense.

CHAPTER 5

His Tools

*"That's a mighty pretty picture
you're doing there, to be home-
made."*

GEORGIA FARMER

"SO YOU SKETCH," says the hostess in a *Punch* drawing to her guest. "How nice. So much cheaper than photography." And how right she is! Consider the photographer with his precious baggage: his Leica and tripod, his lenses—Tessar, Dagor, Contessa-Nettl (their very names evoke the fragrance of the camera, the poetry of the darkroom, and perhaps some olive-skinned Graustarkian beauty concealed within its labyrinth), his developers and enlargers, his Orthochromatic, his Panchromatic plates, his Technicolor! ("See 'Up in Mabel's Room,' " cries the movie ad, "in blushing Technicolor.") How expensive it all sounds. And how

expensive it is. A sort of super-Meccano set, adding set 5 to set 5a to make set number 6, but whose divergent series, unlike the toys of my youth, never reach a limit of possible acquisitions. A fairy land of catalogues, golden dreams of Compur, Duotar, and Voigtlander, of Contax and Graflex and Minimax, of larger and longer lenses, of faster and more focal-plane shutters, of smaller and tastier cameras, all brighter and shinier, the one than the other—a jeweled paradise! What a poet was lost to verse the day he entered the portals of Kodak!

Yes, painting is much cheaper. All the equipment needed is a sturdy easel (mine cost a hundred francs in 1929 and I replaced it for ten dollars last year) and a light paint box with the palette inside. Across the easel and through the paint box flows a steady stream of canvas, paints, and brushes, all bought and used up and bought again with astonishing regularity—like the flow of food through an ice-box. Painting materials are not cherished and hoarded, but used. No painter ever thinks of them as costing money. They are part of his normal living like rent or grocery bills. The paint tubes are emptied, thrown away, and replaced, the canvas unrolled, painted on, and sold or thrown away. Brushes are used and washed and used again until they are ragged and can be used no more. For a painter to let his brushes stay dirty is considered professionally immoral, like a child's throwing bread into the fire—the sure sign of an evil life. The

painter thinks of none of these things as an expense. And indeed they are not. For pictures get sold and materials get paid for by the price the picture brings. Frames, on the other hand, because they are not in any way connected with the manufacturing of paintings, but are part of the external mechanism for turning paintings into art, the painter is apt to think of as a shocking extravagance. But what he spends on canvas, paints, or brushes he never regrets or even regards as money.

More artisans treat their tools with respect. And, just as a good artisan can be known by his clean, sharp tools, neatly kept in proper order, there is a similar way of judging a painter. But it is not quite the same. Here I am disclosing a valuable trade secret, the infallible method of telling a good painter without ever seeing one of his pictures, from the simple inspection of the implements he uses—the pea for testing the princess. Examine his canvas. Look at his palette. If his canvas is the best and most beautiful that his money can buy and if his palette is filthy, he is a good painter. The canvas the good painter works on will always be costly and beautiful. For therein lies ease of work and the sensual pleasure of painting. Not so much can be said for his other tools. He may paint with porch paint from the five-and-ten, his solitary brush may resemble a pen picked up in a post office, and he may still be a good painter. When his palette gets overloaded with geological accre-

tions of paint, he will perhaps clean it; when his paint box gets too full of leaves and dirt to close, he may chuck it away and get another. But the painter who wastes his sense of order and arrangement on his palette and paint box will not have enough left over for his picture. He is in love with his tools, not their use. His painting will be dry, thin, and economical, and he will come to no good end.

You will notice that when I speak of painting I mean oil painting on canvas. Because that is what painting is today—not pastel, not tempera, not fresco, not water color. “An amateur,” Samuel Butler has reported someone saying to him, “can do very nice things in water colors. But oils require genius.” This is a very pretty sentiment, not in any way true, but everybody believes it. And because water color is also reputed to be cheaper and less messy than oil (parents very wisely give their children water colors to play with, because oils are with difficulty removed from rugs), most beginners start painting in water color.

But nobody can. Not even the professionals, much less the beginner. Water color is just too hard to do, too precarious, too uncertain; far too much must be left to chance. It is like trying to keep house on a tightrope. And if anybody, by some particular knack or uncommon virtuosity, manages to learn to paint in water color, all his

water colors will look just like the water colors of everybody else. They will be the same size, because it is too difficult to paint bigger or smaller—the same texture, for they must all be done on that same rough Whatman paper—in the same manner, of Sargent and the school of impressionism that copies the shapes of the shadows in virtuoso brushwork. And all of his water colors will be landscapes, because portraits and figures and even still lifes are much too hard to do in that temperamental conglomeration of drip, sop, and run. Worst of all, when the beginner has once learned to paint in water color he can never learn to paint in oil. He cannot train himself to be extravagant enough with his paint or his time, or to paint with thick lights and thin darks (which is more or less normal in oil and precisely the opposite to what one must do in water color), or to keep his picture light enough. Water color, naturally drying lighter, must be constantly painted darker than one wants, but oils under the same treatment become heavy and lumpy and black. Consequently, it is very easy in any exhibition of oil paintings to spot the painters who have the habit of water color. Oil painters often use water color for jotting down an idea or for planning a composition, but they will never consider the result anything more than a sketch, however fine it may be. Cézanne used to leave his water colors behind him in the fields.

Oil painting is something else. It can be done in

all sizes, all colors, at all speeds, all times, fast or slow, thick or thin, broad or detailed, rough or smooth, matte or shiny. Oil colors are easy to match, stay where you put them, work hand in hand with you like a friend or mistress, and not like a skittish house guest or visiting celebrity. Oil is home folks. It is neat and exact, bright and easy. It is a serious medium for serious work. Hurray for oil!

Before I go on about paints, I had better stop and give the reader a short lesson in physics, about the additive and subtractive mixtures of colors, and what the index of refraction of a medium does to the pigment ground in it. If the reader is not interested in physics, he can, with a clear conscience, skip the next few pages. For although the effects I speak of are real, and to the painter important, I can give for them only the explanation in fashion at the present time, in terms of the mythology of technological progress.

If you hold a piece of blue glass to the light, it will let through, not only the blue part of the light, but the green and violet part as well. All that blue glass keeps from your eye is the yellow and most of the red. In the same way a piece of yellow glass will let pass green and yellow and red and nothing else. Now, if you look through the two glasses superimposed, you will see green, for that is the only light that can pass both glasses.

This is what is called a subtractive mixture of colors, and it is what happens when you mix paints if one or both of the pigments are transparent.

On the other hand, if you put the two glasses into two separate magic lanterns and project their two images on the same white screen, the red, yellow, and green parts of the spectrum, which are in the yellow beam, will fall upon the violet, blue, and green of the blue beam. All the colors of the spectrum will be mixed. If the glasses are properly balanced, the result will be a white light. This is what is called an additive mixture. It occurs whenever colors are mixed as lights and not as pigments. In subtractive mixtures—in mixtures of paints—the complement of yellow is purple and of green is red, as one well knows. But in additive mixtures—in the mixtures of lights—the complement of yellow is blue and of green is violet (or rather fuchsia). You can make an additive mixture by putting little dots of color side by side. At a certain distance from the dots, their images overlap on the retina of the eye and mix as lights. That is what the impressionists were doing with their spotting (later, pointillist) technique—mixing colors, not on the palette, but in the eye. Additive mixtures are more luminous than subtractive ones, so that by using all the brightest colors Monet was able to paint a luminous gray; just as by using all the orchestral timbres, Debussy was able, I have been told, to portray silence.

The existence of two different ways of mixing color may sound strange. But if you want to try it out, mix the dry powders of ultramarine blue and or burnt umber brown. If they are in the right proportions you will get a fairly bright purple. Add a little water and stir the mess and you will have a dark gray, almost black. You have changed your mixture from an additive to a subtractive one.

The "index of refraction" is the measure of how much a substance bends a ray of light that travels through it. It is the refraction of the glass it is made of that causes a prism or a lens to deflect the light and form a rainbow or an image. Even an opaque thing, like a metal, has an index of refraction. The covering power of a paint depends on the ratio of the indexes of refraction of the pigment and of the medium in which it is ground. Chalk writes very well on a blackboard. Wet it and the writing disappears. The chalk itself has not been changed. It has only been immersed in water which has a higher index of refraction than air. The chalk has become transparent and no longer hides the blackboard. In the same way the opacity of a paint film will change if the index of refraction of the medium it is ground in changes. If the index increases, as that of linseed oil does with age, the paint film will become more transparent, darker, and richer. If it decreases, as does that of water color or tempera when it dries, the paint film will become more opaque, paler, and chalkier.

Oil paint is nothing but dry pigment powder mixed with linseed or poppy-seed oil. Many painters make their own oil paints just as they often prepare their own canvases. Homemade paint is less expensive and less likely to be adulterated than any paint you can buy. Oil paint has almost the same tone dry as wet, because its refractive index changes little on first drying. Consequently the painter working in oils has no trouble at all matching his wet and dry colors. However, the high refractive index of the oil renders the pigments somewhat transparent, and its yellow tinge dirties their tone, so that colors ground in oil, especially the blues, never have the beautiful intensity of the untempered pigments. A painter generally does not like to paint in too dark a key, because oil paint always gets darker as it gets older; its refractive index increases with age and the paint film becomes both richer and more transparent. This is why spots of retouching, put down to match the tones of a picture that has already darkened, grow darker still and become visible five or six years later as ugly discolorations, and why ghosts of the painter's abandoned intentions sometimes appear later on the surface of his picture—as in the celebrated Velásquez, where the horse has five legs.

Pastel is pure pigment powder, molded into sticks with just enough of a starch binder to keep the sticks from falling to pieces in the hands. There is no painting medium at all. Consequently pastel is extremely brilliant, as brilliant as the paint

powders it is made from. The mixtures of pastels are additive—the small grains of dry color lie side by side like small dots. Blue and yellow pastels rubbed together make something that is nearer gray than green. To make green, one must have a green pastel. Purple, however, is not a real color—like orange or green, which correspond to certain parts of the spectrum. It is the name we give to the mixture of red and blue light, and can be properly got only by an additive mixture. So that purples in pastel are easy to mix and very pretty indeed, which cannot be said of them in oil. Pastel is very luminous, for like all additive mixtures, it reflects a great deal of light. Pictures executed in it are just as permanent as the pigments used and the paper they are on, provided they are protected from damp and rubbing. The pastels by La Tour are probably less changed than any of the oils of the other eighteenth-century portraitists. There used to be in Naples a contemporary copy of Velásquez's *Bacchus and the Vintagers* that is perhaps more brilliant than the original ever was. But pastel is in infinitely more danger of accidents than is oil, and is just as hard to work with. To protect it, a pastel must be framed under glass at once; and no one wants his studio cluttered up with a lot of glass and framed pictures. Pastel can be fixed, of course, by spraying something on it, like gum or a thin varnish. De-gas must have used some such system. But whatever is used kills the brilliance of the pastel—and

its reason for being. For portraits, pastel has this advantage—when it is done it is done. This is not true for an oil picture. It takes a certain time for an oil painting to ripen, for the colors to blend, for the separate layers to become unified, for the paint to become richer by the increase of the index of refraction of the oil. It is always embarrassing to have to turn over to a client something that looks unfinished, chalky, and dead, and tell him that in six months everything will be all right. It is true, but he won't believe you. Pastel, on the other hand, does not have to wait. The last stroke completes it.

Tempera is perhaps the most beautiful of all the ways of painting. There are any number of temperas. Many are trade secrets, studio secrets, or lost. Many are down in books. In general, tempera is a mayonnaise sauce (technically an emulsion) made with egg, oil, and varnish, and thinned with water. But practically any household commodity—wax, milk, flour, lye, vinegar, honey, cherry gum, fig milk, and so on—has gone into the composition of one of them. Because water thins it, a tempera medium was indispensable before the commercial distillation of turpentine made oil painting practical. Because the medium has no color (the egg yellow bleaches out after a few days) and once it is dry, both an unchanging refractive index and enormous physical strength, colors ground in it are very brilliant, do not change with age, and

actually protect the surface they are painted on. However, the change in the refractive index of the medium from the wet state to the dry is very great. And since this happens almost at once, with the evaporation of the water, and in a very irregular manner, the matching of colors in tempera is very difficult and modeling in paint is almost impossible. For modeling, one is forced to use crosshatching and drawing strokes. Tempera, to be sure, is often used nowadays as a first coat for rapidly laying in an oil picture. Or, mixed up in little pots in a prearranged color scale, it is employed on plaster panels by people of an archæological mind—generally trained in Florence—in what they consider the cinquecento manner. Indeed, a tempera paint surface is so beautiful that in spite of the difficulty of its employment, it is nevertheless very tempting to the painter.

Fresco has about disappeared from the modern world along with its only reason for existence, mural painting. It is, to my way of thinking, the most difficult of all the painting techniques. The pigment, ground in water and without the addition of a binder of any sort, is painted into the fresh plaster of a plaster wall. Only the earth colors and a few others that the lime does not affect can be used. The lakes, vermilion, and ultramarine must be discarded. Slaked lime is used for white. The setting of the plaster incorporates the colors into its surface. One can tell by counting the joints of a fresco,

exactly how many days the painter worked on it. For he must paint the picture in small sections. Only the area which can be finished before the plaster dries—in six or seven hours at the most—can be prepared. And retouching is not possible. The colors dry pale. All the tones must be mixed in advance. Once they are dry on the wall, it is impossible to match them. Nevertheless, in spite of its difficulty, fresco was practiced at one time with extraordinary skill and ease. And I, for one, cannot imagine anything more beautiful than the Benozzo Gozzoli room in Florence. Fresco stands very ill the damp and smoke of our northern cities, but it is much practiced in Mexico, where the climate is drier and purer than our own.

Of course, mural painting does not necessarily have to be done in fresco, and today seldom is. The difficulties of the medium are usually too great to be faced. Ordinarily in modern times the mural is painted in oil on canvas in the painter's studio and is then pasted to the wall it is intended to adorn by a member of the painters' and paperhangers' union; there it cannot be retouched by the painter unless he is a member of that union himself. There was practiced in Roman times a mysterious method of encaustic painting in which the colors were presumably mixed with melted wax and applied hot. *The Last Supper* of Leonardo was done in some elaborate and secret process of oil or wax or tempera invented by the painter, and is rather an

example of literary immortality than of the permanence of paint. For the picture had already begun to deteriorate before the painter had finished it, and by the time it was defaced by Napoleon's horses, it had, I understand, already been repainted several times. It was again repainted in the 1900's by a German professor, and now, after its recent redestruction in the last war has again been repainted and, through the courtesy of the Allied Art Commission, is again in a perfect state of preservation.

Modern painting methods have, in fact, very little at all in common with those of the past. If you have ever stood in a museum and watched a painter copying an old master, you will certainly be aware of this. For you cannot have failed to notice how little the painter's copy is ever like his model. That is not surprising. He is not using the same sort of paint.

If, until about the year 1830, you had gone to a color merchant's to buy paint, you would have come away, not with paint already prepared, but with dry pigment in powder or lumps, and you or your apprentice would have made paint out of it at home. You would have ground it with linseed oil, or glue, or egg, or with mixtures that were secrets, or recipes of common knowledge that now are lost because no one ever thought of writing

them down. And you would have used the paint as you made it. For if you did not, it dried up.

Eventually, color merchants began to mix paint for the painters. Prepared paint was sold, stored in little bladders or little parchment bags with a brass nozzle, or simply with a thumb tack stuck in to make and close the hole. Containers of this sort were neither cheap nor practical. With the invention of the tin tube (according to Winsor and Newton, the English color merchants, it came on the market in 1841), a great change took place.

The painter was now completely freed of the necessity of grinding his own paint. Paints could be kept a long time without drying up. Painting kits became compact and light and could be carried anywhere. Landscape began to be painted on the spot, and not, as it had always been done before, in the studio from sketches. Color merchants became paint manufacturers. To keep their paints from drying up on the shelf before they were sold, they began to add wax and insoluble metallic soaps to their mixtures. These additions—aluminum or magnesium stearates and palmitates, or hydrates of alumina and silica and so on—transparent, cheap, and highly absorbent of oil, gave oil paint an entirely new texture. Painters began to paint in a rough-surfaced impasto, the thicker substance of the paint standing up on the canvas like little pats of butter. It actually took more and thicker paint to

cover a canvas, for the adulterant enabled the color merchant to put more oil and less pigment in his mixtures, and the paints were less opaque than before. The picture might dry up in spots and lighten in spots. To correct this, heavy and quick varnishing became necessary. The elaborate impressionist technique of interlocking brush strokes of the brightest colors was probably invented to enable the painter to get with these store-bought colors as rich a surface as the ancients were able to obtain with their fewer pigments and their paints prepared at home.

Our chemists have presented us with many new and brilliant pigments unknown to the old masters. Where they had two yellows, both dull, and vermillion, we have a complete scale of the cadmiums from the palest lemon to a middle red. Where they possessed a real ultramarine (extracted from crushed lapis lazuli, permanent, but costing its weight in solid gold), a fugitive indigo, and a doubtful azurite, we have cerulean, monastral, and cobalt. We have bright and permanent greens; they had none. Their lakes were perhaps superior to our alizarin crimson. But that may have been a skill in handling as well as a lost secret of preparation. What both we and they lack is in the range from red through the rosy tones to purple. The painting of red and violet flowers, if we wish to equal their hues, cannot be done—not until some friendly chemist finds for us some really intense, permanent,

unbleeding rosy-reds, both transparent and opaque. Of course, we can get along very well without them. And we do. But pigments like that would be a great pleasure to possess.

There is nothing mysterious about the actual pigments used in the old paintings. They have all been analyzed by chemistry. But how they were painted and in precisely what medium are more difficult to discover. Rabbit-skin glue and gelatin are probably precisely the same in a chemical analysis. Nevertheless, they do not act at all the same way in priming a canvas. I doubt that even the best of chemists could tell me why the mayonnaise sauce, so easy to make in America, seems to be one of the most difficult of all culinary feats in France. Processes of cookery are almost impossible to reconstruct from an inspection of the product. And cooking recipes are exactly what the secrets of the old masters were. There are in Dürer a yellow and a green that, I am told, can only be saffron and verdigris, two notoriously fugitive pigments. There is some vague report of using them with, or boiling them in, Venice turpentine, an exudation of the spruce. However that may be, the colors are as bright today as the day Dürer put them on. Nobody knows how or why. There is even a possibility that the celebrated "brown tree" of the eighteenth-century landscapes comes from a tree that was originally intended to be green, but that, painted in verdigris after the secret had been lost,

turned brown, and, as a brown tree, became a fashion because it was pretty that way. Cennino Cennini, writing a painting manual in the early fifteenth century, left elaborate instructions for the painting of pictures in egg tempera. I would defy the most skillful painter to copy, by the methods he describes, a Filippino Lippi, who also painted in egg tempera. Nearer to us there is in New York a portrait of Maria Anna of Austria by Velázquez painted, as it would seem, in only vermilion, umber, black, and white. The most astute copyist in the world could not imitate its silvery grays and flesh tones using boughten tubes of only those colors. I doubt whether he could do it using all the colors in the modern palette. There is, or was, in the Fogg Museum in Cambridge, an unfinished Tintoretto in which the flesh of the goddess, cool and matte, seems to have been dusted and smoothed with some heavenly and most ambrosial cosmetic. I and any other painter would give our right hands to be able to paint it. For it cannot be accomplished with anything we have in our paint boxes.

Of course, we can always console ourselves with the thought that the paint qualities of the old masters are an effect of time, and that time, which in general is kind to all painting, will be kind also to ours. But a rapid journey through the rooms of any museum that houses our immediate predecessors will quickly undeceive that hope. I was shown the other day what I was told was Whistler's palette. I

believe it was. For all the colors on it (as are the colors today in so many of his pictures), were quite black.

Time is not the only thing that is likely to be unkind to our pictures. Collectors and museums are frequently unkind as well, and painters are often distressed by a persistent and dangerous misconception in the popular mind as to what the nature of a picture actually is.

People who are not painters always think of pictures as ideas—as things that have their existence in the mind. Consequently, they treat them rough. Ideas can take rough treatment. A check for a hundred dollars is an idea. It is the symbol for an act—the act of passing over to someone else one hundred silver dollars (which are themselves symbols just as well). And no matter how much the check is rumpled or dirtied or injured or torn, its value as a symbol is not changed in the slightest as long as it exists at all. But a picture is not a symbol (although it too may be exchanged for money). And crumpling it or dirtying it or punching holes in it hurts it a great deal. Pictures are incredibly fragile; considering the tremendous punishment they receive, they are also incredibly sturdy. For years I have tried to show my mother that when pictures are stacked against a wall and the corner of one leans against the face of another, that corner will leave a dent that is very difficult to remove.

She is a very good housekeeper. But that she will never learn. For she thinks of pictures as art. Janitors in museums are always sticking screw-drivers through masterpieces. People will hang pictures over radiators where their priming can be fortified by steam and their colors richly embellished with a deposit of soot. They will clean them with laundry soap or gasoline or ammonia, or send them to the local photographer's to be retouched. And then they are surprised at their pictures' appearance. Or perhaps they do not even notice. For most people do not see anything anyway.

There is a rule of politeness most people do not know but which should be observed by anyone who owns a picture. It is this: if your picture is dirty or has a hole in it or has mildewed or needs varnishing or is cracking or peeling or has suffered any one of the thousand accidents that can befall a picture, tell the painter himself and ask him what to do. Do not address yourself to any painter but the one who painted your picture, or he—and how right he is—will never forgive you. If the painter is dead or cannot be reached, find a competent restorer—not the local photographer or frame maker or decorator or school teacher who has art classes, but a real picture restorer who has a shop and equipment and prices (you can get his name from the nearest museum; they always have one)—and ask him what to do.

Of course, if pictures are not too dirty, they can

be cleaned with potato juice or mild acetic acid. But I would not advise you to do it yourself. You will not know which to use, and you may easily damage a fragile ground. Never use soap and water on a picture; the soap is too hard to remove from the cracks of the paint and will do a lot of damage. Never use turpentine; it may dissolve your picture. Never use alcohol; you will find yourself faced with a bare canvas. Never oil your picture with linseed oil; in six months it may turn dark brown. Send your picture to a competent restorer.

I have seen, in a local framer's, a small sixteenth-century Flemish *Christ and the Doctors* painted in tempera on a panel, which some GI had liberated; it was being further liberated by the framer, who was daubing the injured spots with oil paint. I am sure that the GI's mother for whom the picture was intended would not have known the difference. Nevertheless, the picture properly taken care of would have had a certain money value.

Some time ago I was asked to restore what the owner called "two ancestral portraits." They were charming pictures, probably painted in Vienna in the forties or fifties, all very smooth and detailed, each pearl in place. They were in a frightful state. The glue that had held the painting ground to the web of the canvas was completely gone. The paint film had curled up in ribbons that looked like curlicues of celluloid. To restore them would have been an extraordinarily difficult job. I could not under-

take it. I told the owner to go to a restorer. Later I saw the pictures in a local jewelry shop. The pictures were completely ruined; the jeweler had restored them. Proud of his work, he said: "These pictures were done in a very rare technique. They were painted on paper." He had mistaken the curled-up painting ground for dry-rotten paper.

A proper restorer would have "relined" the ailing portraits, and if he knew his trade, no one could have guessed afterward that the pictures had ever been injured at all. The restorer would have taken the pictures off their stretchers, dampened or done something to the ribbons of paint film to make them lie flat, pasted sheet after sheet of tissue paper onto the surface of the picture until he had a strong enough support, turned the pictures over on their faces, separated the original canvas from the paint film—which the layers of tissue paper now hold firm—by moistening and pulling the canvas or by sandpapering it off, replaced the old canvas by a new and good one, which he would have glued on and ironed smooth with a warm flatiron, washed off the tissue paper, removed the old varnish, nailed the pictures back to their stretchers, mended the injured places by replacing the spots of missing ground and repainting them with tempera paint, which does not change color with age. And finally, the restorer would have revarnished the pictures, and they would have been as good as new. But

as you can see, it is a complicated job and needs a patient and a skillful hand.

Restorers can do incredible things. They can even remove a fresco from the plaster of one wall and put it up on another. I once saw a Ghirlandajo painted on a wooden panel as big as a bed. The panel had warped and cracked, and the picture, face down on the restorer's workbench, was being transferred to another panel. The warped panel had been sawed and planed and sandpapered off. The plaster ground on which the picture was painted had been removed. And the back of the paint film itself was visible, with the first thin drawing lines in brown that the painter had put down when he began his picture.

In the early twenties an American collector bought in Europe for a very large sum a small Bellini, which he packed in a metal box, insured, and sent home. During the voyage fire broke out in the hold of the ship. The fire was extinguished but water got in the metal box and the Bellini was stewed. The insurance company paid, took the picture, box and all, and deposited it in a vacant room at their offices. The steam had destroyed the glue of the plaster ground the Bellini was painted on; the entire picture lay loose on the panel, one enormous blister. When an inquisitive office boy picked up the box to inspect it and let it slip, the whole mess slid to the floor and lay there in crumbs

and dust. The Fogg Museum bought the fragments. Its restorer locked himself in the vacant room, glued each small bit of picture to a piece of gauze—like Psyche sorting out the millet grains in the service of Love—fitted them together like a jigsaw puzzle on another panel, and painted in matching tones the few remaining gaps that were necessarily left. The picture can be seen today, and, except for the small missing spaces, which, if the museum had wished, the restorer could have easily concealed, no one could possibly imagine that anything had ever happened to it.

The restorer's great trick is the removal of overpainting. Oil paint takes a long time to dry; in fact, it is never completely dry. Overpainting put on a dry picture is never as hard, even years afterward, as the earlier paint. And the restorer can remove it by the use of differential solvents. That frequently has to be done. For a hat in a picture will have gone out of style, and somebody will have got a local artist to paint on a more fashionable one, or to touch up Great-aunt Elsie's face so she won't look so ugly. Often, instead of cleaning a picture, someone who is handy at things like that will have freshened it up with a new coat of paint till it is as good as new.

Some time ago the administrators of an Eastern museum bought a small daub that they claimed was a Botticelli. Documents, they said, proved it authentic. It was late Botticelli, perhaps done after

he had been reformed by Savonarola and had thrown all his pictures in the fire. Probably his conversion had also made him forget how to paint. Everybody in the museum who had any actual sense about painting rejoiced—the authorities had at last put their foot in it; the picture was undeniably a daub—until it was sent to the restorer's for cleaning. He removed the overpainting and revealed a jewel of a Botticelli in perfect condition.

As an example of restoration in reverse, a restorer told me of a lady who came to him with a portrait of a Civil War ancestor wearing a long stringy beard. "I want you," she said, "to trim off some of the beard and show his necktie. You know I have always been a great admirer of General Lee."

There is also the old chestnut about the American who bought a Rembrandt in Europe, and to avoid the customs, the property tax, or something of the sort, had an impressionist landscape—that will give you an idea of the age of the joke—painted on it before he shipped it home. Once home, he sent it to a restorer to have the impressionist picture removed. Shortly afterward he received a letter from the restorer who wrote: "Dear Sir: We have removed the landscape and the Rembrandt and come to a portrait of George the Third. Shall we go farther?" The joke is not very funny because that is just what restorers do.

They can also exaggerate. There are fashions in restorations as in anything else. If clean pictures

are in fashion, restorers will remove, with the varnish, all the painter's finishing touches and leave the picture distressingly naked. And if antique-looking pictures are in demand, they have been known to mix a little bitumen in their final varnish. A friend of mine claims to have seen one of them in a museum standing before a small Sienese Madonna with a brush and a pot of paint in his hands. The walls of the gallery had evidently been painted blue to match the background of the picture. But the color had not come out right. So the restorer was doing the easier thing. He was repainting the background of the picture to go with the walls of the room.

From all this one can understand why painters are a little uneasy when they send their pictures to exhibitions, and always examine them carefully for possible injuries on their return, and why they are upset when they find their pictures hung over a radiator in a client's house, and why they peer uneasily into the corners of their early works searching for color changes or cracks. For the signs of decay in his picture are the germs of mortality of the painter's fame. But however unhappy, it is nothing compared with the unhappiness he experiences when he is faced with the problem of frames. And although frames are not actually part of the painter's tools, I will nevertheless speak of them here, for they are a necessary part of the mechanism

for turning painting into art—a process that fascinates the painter as much, and that he understands as little, as the problem of framing itself.

If painting nowadays were done like painting in the past, if the whole approach to making pictures had not been changed by the impressionists, framing, though it would still be difficult and expensive, would not be the nightmare it is today to the painter, the picture buyer, and everybody else. The painter, the framer, and the collector, all go off into a panic of indecision when the word “frame” is pronounced. For the methods of composition and painting have completely changed, and the solution of the framing problem, which worked so well for the older painting, will not work at all for the paintings of the present day. Modern pictures will not take gold frames.

The gold frame is a tradition handed down from the time when the primary purpose of a small picture was to decorate chests and altar-pieces and other gilded furniture with scenes from legends and from the lives of the saints, and when the small picture was actually painted in tempera on a gold background. The gold frame is an inheritance from the gold ornamentation of the furniture itself. Gold leaf has always been laid on a brick-red ground. That is the color of the Armenian bole—a sort of red clay—that was put on the plaster of the panels and carvings and that glued the gold leaf down and enabled it to be burnished. Later, to assure the unity

of the painting and the customary gold frame, pictures were commonly painted on a brick-red ground almost the same color as the bole. In most of these pictures the general tone of the background is dark. Against the dark the light areas form the accents and the pattern of the picture. For the painter has been careful to see that nothing of any importance, no accented light areas, will come against the gold of the frame. The picture has been planned to be a pattern of bright objects surrounded by dark, which in turn is surrounded by the bright frame. In framing, the only things to be watched are that the size of the detail of the frame matches the size of the detail in the picture, that the width and depth of the frame are not so great that the picture looks small and crowded, or so little that the frame looks meager and poor, and that the workmanship of the frame is carefully enough done and expensive enough looking to accord with the market value of the picture.

Pictures painted during the last eighty years will not accept so simple a choice. To obtain greater luminosity, painters since the impressionists have painted on white grounds. The darks, and not the lights, now form the accents and the pattern of the picture. Influenced, with or without his conscious knowledge, by the Japanese print and with the purpose of making his picture equally interesting all over, the painter will bring his design up to the very edge of his canvas. A gold frame will no

longer do. The tone of the picture is no longer golden or yellow, and swears at a gold enclosure. The dark accents are likely to bleed over into the frame. A white frame, matching the white ground, is more becoming to a modern picture. But a white frame seldom goes with the decoration of a room and always looks inexpensive, which, of all things, is least desired by everybody. The gold frame, at least, had the natural advantage of always looking costly. The problem faced by the present-day framer is to make a frame look rich and yet not be gold. It is very difficult. The best solution is—like the old tweed coat, threadbare but from a good tailor—a carved and gilded frame from which the gilding has been removed. But for a frame to look properly rich, it must be a carved frame and not a plaster one. An old coat which was not well made in the beginning has no chic. But even a *décapé* frame of this sort will not isolate the modern picture enough; the picture is still likely to bleed over into the frame. So to isolate it still more a neutral band, a narrow liner of wood, painted or covered with linen, is generally inserted between the picture and the frame. With a band of this sort even a gold frame, if suitable dulled down, can sometimes be used.

The primary purpose of framing is to concentrate the spectator's attention on the picture, to limit the picture, and isolate it on the wall. The frame should not attract attention to itself. It should

not be too difficult in style from the other furnishings of the room, should be as carefully made as the oil surface of the picture itself, and should look as rich and sumptuous as the social standing and the market value of the picture will allow.

As a matter of fact, this last is precisely the second and equally important function of a frame—to define a picture's social standing and market value. And, just as a man can be well dressed in any number of ways—in overalls, pajamas, slacks, tweeds, tails, or nothing at all—and how he is dressed depends on what he is going to do and in what company he is going to do it, so a picture can be well framed in any number of ways depending on what it is expected to do and where it is going to hang. But the living painter has no idea of his picture's eventual intellectual tone or what its social tone will eventually be, where it will hang, how much it will be worth, and what company it is going to keep. All he knows is that he painted as well as he could something that interested him. And that is no help to him at all.

Consequently, framing is always a headache to the painter. Frames are not only difficult to choose, they are awkward to store as well, and owning them commits the painter to making pictures in sizes he already has frames for. And for some reason or other—perhaps the natural perversity of the human mind—when a painter paints a picture especially for a frame he already has, the frame

never suits the picture he intended for it. So painters seldom own frames if they can help it, and when they need a frame, many painters avoid the difficulty of an empty guess and an expensive decision by putting around the picture strips of black or white painted wood, which serve the primary purpose of framing by concentrating the spectator's attention and isolating the picture from the wall, but which are easily disposed of, and which do not compromise the picture by involving it in any social tone or style of decoration. That is all well enough as far as it goes. But then the painter expects that when the picture is sold, the buyer will get his own frame to suit his own interior—a thing which, unfortunately, few buyers are either capable of doing or willing to attempt.

So, in search of expert advice, the painter seeks out the specialist in the definition of social tone, the interior decorator. But there he is barking up the wrong tree. For the decorator is a specialist in defining the social standing, not of the pictures of a living painter, but of his own client. And that the decorator must do, not with such equivocal material as our painter's pictures, but with things whose social position is already secure. Unable to get help from the decorator, the painter goes to the nearest picture framer and spends hours of agony and indecision trying out inadequate frames and idiotic ideas. He knows that he is going to choose wrong anyway. So he refuses to spend enough

money and the frame comes out looking, along with its other faults, cheap. He is never satisfied, and feels guilty about framing as something he should know all about, but that is really out of his control. For he knows that no one will know how to frame his pictures until they are completely acceptable as art, until their social and intellectual tone is firmly established and he himself is dead. So that although he thinks he should be, he is not capable of being interested in framing at all.

Nevertheless, in spite of this inadequacy in front of his own work, the painter is a perfectly good judge of those qualities that will enable a painting possessing them to be eventually converted into art, and consequently into money. And as I have already told the reader at the beginning of this chapter how to tell a good painter, now I will disclose to him another and—because it may mean money in his pocket—even more valuable secret: how to know what picture to buy. Here it is:

Put a painter in front of a picture and ask him.

The painter is, I assure you, the only one in the world who knows anything about painting. If you can get him to talk about a picture, you will probably have to discount his natural malice toward a rival—which is tremendous—or get behind his reluctant politeness, his hesitancy in saying something disobliging about a fellow artist. But then you will find out what he knows. And he does know, for he has been trained to see. And what he sees today,

other people will see tomorrow. But, mind you, it must be an opinion about a picture he has really seen, preferably about one he is actually looking at. At a distance he will dislike too much the abstract idea of another painter, both his work and his subject matter. Looking at the picture will clear his mind. He will see the work itself without being confused by its style, fashionableness, or subject matter, and he will tell you its actual qualities.

Degas was notoriously the most difficult, the most malicious man in all Paris. But Vollard, the picture dealer, got on to Cézanne, and a handsome investment, because Degas, when asked, said to him: "That fellow Cézanne is the best of us all."

CHAPTER 6

Beauty

"I saw a picture just like that in the five-and-ten. But it had a frame."

VERMONT FARMER

WHEN I was a beginner learning to paint, I was more than a little bothered because I seemed to have very little to do with beauty. I soon found, however, much more interesting things than that to worry about, and quickly discovered that, of all the possible subjects of painting, beauty is the least satisfactory. As a subject for painting, beauty is either too disturbing to the peace of mind or too trite. For beauty is an emotion, and it is provoked by two things and by two things alone: by something we want to possess or by memories of art. A person we can imagine ourselves in love with, or in bed with, is beautiful; a sunset is beautiful when it reminds us of a picture we have seen. Neither of

these states of mind leads to original work. So, the painter painting beauty is either seeing it at second hand and copying a picture that has already been painted by someone else, or he is painting, not what he sees, but the emotions the thing he is seeing arouses in him. And unless he can find in the thing he is painting another quality than beauty to point his attention, his subject will dazzle him and he will go blind to it.

Interest is that other quality. Anything that is interesting to look at can be painted. But beauty is not interesting to look at; it is a fascination, a cause of bewilderment. It cannot be used; it is itself the aggressor. It does not fix the attention; on the contrary, it destroys the attention by turning the spectator's interest from the thing he is looking at to the feelings the thing is causing within him. It is an enchantment, a magic spell. It enchants the beholder, bemuses him. He cannot see clearly, and if he is a painter, he cannot paint. And the painter who is painting beauty is in a bad way unless he is using the word "beauty" as the generic name for his subject matter. In that case he is merely being pretentious and is not painting beauty at all, but only the things that he and others have found interesting to look at. Children, I am sure, are all beautiful. But the painter who actually finds them so will have a mighty hard time with the little wretches.

So that proposition number one of this æsthetic

is: beauty is not a fit subject for painting. Proposition number two is just as rude: a beautiful picture is a dead picture.

Pictures, when they are fresh painted, are not beautiful. They can scarcely even be sold. People in most cases will prefer a painter's older works to the ones he has just finished, even though the new ones are better painted and will themselves in a few years sell like hot cakes. A contemporary picture is not beautiful. It may be interesting. It may attract the eye often and hold it long. It may be arresting, disturbing, amazing, revealing. It may show you things you never saw before. But it cannot be beautiful. Nor will it be until the painter is dead and cannot do it any more, until fashion has changed and people have different things on their minds and the picture has lost its disturbing actuality, until no one remembers what the picture was all about and all that remains within its frame are the formal perfection of its proportions and its existence in the nostalgia of the more nearly perfect world of an untroubled past—until the picture is thoroughly and completely dead.

This is why:

Fashion and the need for change are not a trivial joke or a domestic silliness. We are likely to think of fashion as silly and unnecessary because what comes to our mind is yesterday's ugly and unnecessary hat and how silly were all the ladies who wanted it—forgetting that yesterday the hat

may have been funny, but that it was neither ugly nor unnecessary, and that tomorrow it will be charming. Fashion is neither silly nor unnecessary. It is one of the major forces of the world, and has to do with how everybody, everywhere, at the same time, unreasonably and quite spontaneously, finds a new and different thing interesting to look at, and envisages this new thing under a new set of proportions—how everybody finds the new set of proportions quite normal, in fact forgets that any other set of proportions can exist, and discovers that the things they have just stopped being interested in and the proportions they have just stopped using have become unutterably stupid and ugly.

This new set of proportions is fashion itself, its bones and flesh and sinews. What fashion operates on, its subject matter, so to speak, is the new thing that everybody is looking at at that moment: what people have on their minds, how they envisage the world, and what disguise they wish to assume to make themselves feel more at home in it.

What everybody has on his mind depends on the philosophical and scientific discoveries of his times. One of the major achievements of the Greeks was their mathematics. They brought the methods of geometry to such perfection that it was not until Descartes, some eighteen centuries later, that any addition was made to their treatment of the conic sections. These, the circle, ellipse, parabola, and hyperbola, together with the Archimedean spiral,

were their triumphs. So, it can surprise no one that Greek temples, instead of being in straight lines and cylindrical columns, are gently varied and twisted to follow these subtle curves. Baroque architecture embodied the intricate volutes and curves-in-three-dimensions that the new Cartesian analysis had discovered. The nineteenth century had the style of the Eiffel Tower, its department stores, and splendid railway terminals, because its engineers had found the use of structural iron and steel. And because of our airplanes and our wind tunnels, we have our streamlined beds and toilet seats. In every case the new discoveries are on everybody's mind, and everything that everybody does, even in the most unrelated fields, is a tribute to the new ideas.*

Clothes are, of course, most obviously and amusingly subject to fashion. Here the subject matter is very apparent. Fashion describes what people suppose is their relation to the world and how they wish to look and feel.

Clothes can be designed for concealment or for high visibility. Ecclesiastical costume is designed for concealment. Here it is the ceremony that is

* Even supernatural beings are subject to this rule. Before the beginning of our century, witches were accustomed to ride their broomsticks to Sabbath with the head of the broom, like a horse's head, in front (*vide* Goya). Today they assume the more efficient air-flow position.

important, not the performer. The priest is turned by his vestment—waistless and shapeless—into an anonymous unit for celebrating the glory of God. The alb and the cope are not tailored; the miter and stole fit the office, not the man. For it is the ceremony that must be seen. And the gestures of the officiant at Mass do not have to carry any distance at all—only far enough to reach the throne of God.

On the other hand, in an epoch when the great personages of the world must appear before the world as on a stage, whatever they do in public must be completely visible both to the pit and the gallery. So that in all times of court and pomp and ceremony, when the individual human being is the star and actor, the human body is, by fashion, articulated like an insect's, divided into limbs, head, abdomen, and thorax, so that each of its attitudes can be seen from far off. In man, the arms and legs are separated from the body by clothing them so tightly that their extension is revealed, and by accenting with huge puffs the point where they join the trunk—or by covering the limbs loosely up to the shoulder and the crotch, where the garment is pulled tight to make more apparent all the articulations. The head is isolated from the shoulders by a ruff, or the length of neck is emphasized by an imposing headdress. The body is divided in two by a girdle or a corset or a false rump. Frequently the great cape is worn, which

makes its wearer seem larger than life and underlines his gestures. The woman's dress has a narrow waist and a huge skirt. Everything is designed to be seen from far away. For the pose of the head and the positions of the body must indicate the grandeur and the dignity that the perhaps invisible severity of the visage cannot convey.

The costume of the ballet is in this tradition. The ballerina's tutu, the little puffs on her shoulders, her hair on the top of her head, and her legs in simple tights, turn the human body into a mathematical instrument for making the measurement of space visible from a distance, a semaphore for transmitting to the farthest spectator messages of position and sentiment. And so successfully does it work that the accomplished dancer never has to smile.

The costumes of the courts of Louis XIV and Louis XV were intended for public show and designed for high visibility. But in the more intimate court of Louis XVI, great receptions went out of style. The most envied gatherings were those *en petit comité*. So the hair of the ladies was allowed to fall on the shoulders, covering the joinings of the neck, and the waist was concealed by a wrap resembling the domestic dressing gown. For the ladies were supposed to be seen from near by. But on the other hand think of Henry VIII of England, and of Elizabeth, dressed like a king and queen of chess, both visible from afar and royal indeed.

At Monticello, the house Jefferson built for himself in Virginia, I was taken upstairs in the company of two Southern ladies. The stairs were dark and narrow, I suppose because Jefferson, as a good Democrat, disapproved of the pompous *escalier d'honneur*, which in a French house of any pretension was designed for the sort of courtly display of clothes and deportment of which I have been speaking. My two ladies were much astonished. "How," they said, "did the women get up and down these narrow stairs in their great big skirts?" They had forgotten that Monticello was built at the time of the "Greek" and "Republican" *Directoire*, when a fashionable lady's dress was so skimpy that everything she wore could be passed through her wedding ring. They were remembering only the ample skirts worn by the mistresses of Louis XV and by the wife of Napoleon III. So that by confusing the styles of the two times and forgetting the century that came between, they were able to attribute an extreme and almost Chinese antiquity to our own Civil War. I, in my turn, was reminded that no Southern Cotton Ball can be complete without the ladies in their ante-bellum gowns, copied from the fashion plates of 1760, an error of only a hundred years.

I think that the people of the eighteenth century must have liked to feel important. Eighteenth-century chairs and tables and ceiling were low, and though the rooms were not always small, they were

usually so light in proportion and in such light, clear colors that their delicacy made people in them seem very large. People of the eighteenth century must also have enjoyed feeling old and wise. For the powdered hair and the costume that hid all but the man's calf and the woman's bosom were in no way becoming to youth, flattered age, and disguised them both in an ageless permanence. In middle Victorian times people obviously pretended to a great personal reticence, for the proportions of their rooms were so heavy, their furniture so massive, and the patterns of their fabrics and wall papers so assertive that anyone placed among them almost disappeared, as did their private life, from public view. The mid-Victorian gentleman's dress was black—partly, in the dark and mephitic city air, to protect the garment from stain, partly to conceal the man. The gilt and mirrors of Louis XIV boasted that his was the greatest court of Europe, for no amount of dirt or handling or misuse by courtiers could possibly obscure their splendor. We, with our recent enthusiasm for white, can only be boasting of our affluence. For in a soot-colored world nothing can be kept white without an infinite attendance of servants—the most expensive thing of modern times. Nothing can better indicate the wealth of its tenant than the spotless white of a Le Corbusier flat.

Fashion uses costume to define social position as well. The upper classes do not labor. The well-

dressed man must not be thought able to demean himself by work. Consequently, the formal costume of all times, even when hand-to-hand fighting is the chief sport of nobles, is designed to hinder the free movements of the body. Only the duelist and billiard player—both indisputably upper class—may remove their coats. I have even been tempted to believe that the knights of the Middle Ages, in the elaborate and practically immovable armor we now see in museums, took no part in fighting at all and made only a formal appearance on the field, that the battles were fought by their squires and soldiers in lighter equipment, and that the heavy armor was of purely honorific use, intended to protect its wearer, not from the enemies' lances, but from the imputation that he himself could engage in actual combat.

I am informed, however, that the armor of the museums is not battle armor at all, but is a very carefully preserved and decorative panoply—the white tie of the Middle Ages—intended not to be worn in battle, but at parties and jousts. The working armor of the time, just as the working clothes of all time, has long ago disappeared, worn out with use, its fragments used up as patches and rivets and hand-me-down pants for Junior when he became old enough himself to go out and fight the paynim.

Fashion may also, by means of clothes, describe what people would like to be but cannot be, what

disguise they would like to assume. It provides, by means of a masquerade, the symbol of the attainment of an unattainable desire.

The easiest example of this is, of course, the cod-piece of the sixteenth century. That carapace and brooch for the lower belly, inflated and stiffened with whalebone and bombast, claimed for its wearer an excessive and permanent virility and denied that the flesh is weak. Or the fashion of the shaved face, which in all times, save when the patriarch is ruler of the tribe and family and consequently is envied and emulated, denies that youth can pass. The Roman gentleman carried this artificial youth to such an excess that as a preparation and as a costume for love, he epilated his whole body.

We all remember the fashions after the first World War. I imagine people were tired of responsibility and wanted to get back to childhood. So they dressed themselves up. The men put on the costume of a fourteen-year-old schoolboy—golf pants like the knickers of their childhood, and short, tight coats like little Eton jackets. The ladies dressed themselves up like little girls, in a low waistline, short skirts, and bobbed hair, and carried themselves so that they would appear to have no breasts at all. Both disguises were almost sexless, a brother-and-sister act. Ever since the ending of that war the dress designers tried to change the styles and bring back the long skirt. No Paris fashion show was complete without one. The cloth manufac-

turers wanted the long skirt back because it would use more fabric; the dress designers wanted it because they were tired of Chanel. But the public would not have it. Then in 1929 the long skirt came in—snap—just like that. Perhaps it was on account of the stock-market crash and the desire for a different sort of world. Perhaps it was because the girls were tired of being only companions to the men and wanted to feel again that they were dangerous and mysterious and provocative. Or it may have been simply that people had played long enough at being children and wanted to be grown-up. All of a sudden public drunkenness, which every one had found so amusing before, was no longer fun. Overnight the long skirt came back (it took the girls some time to learn to walk in them) and overnight the golf pants disappeared. No one has ever worn them since, even for golf. The brother-and-sister act was over. For a while people were again men and women.

The zoot suit of the forties was, I think, another infantilism. The too-large pants, the too-long coat, the enormous hat, the drooping watch chain were a wearing of Papa's clothes, and went along with dances that recalled the singing games of children in their figures and in the expressions on the faces of their dancers. The zoot suit was most popular with our two most oppressed populations, the colored people and the Spanish-speaking people of the Southwest. The unhappy sons and daughters of

the depression had taken it as their traveling costume and were going back to childhood.

Certain standard costumes for certain professions are certainly by way of being disguises. The American banker would not think of dressing himself in anything but a Brooks Brothers suit or its equivalent. That combination of discreet material and sexless cutting is designed to make him look exactly the opposite of the traditional card-sharp—which he probably is. I suppose Parisian journalists, a venal and unhappy race, still dress in wide black hats and Windsor ties, disguising themselves in the habit worn in other years, as a badge of free love and socialism, by free and happy artists. Professors, since they do not live the country life, even in the country-club colleges, dress themselves in tweeds. A tweed coat and flannel trousers (supposed, I imagine, to represent something brought back from an undergraduate reading party in Scotland) have for a number of years replaced the scholar's gown as a symbol of the academic life. In England just after the war, corduroy was scarce and almost impossible to obtain without the agriculturer's ration card, which was issued only to farmers or to gentlemen farming their own estates. I have been told that no English artist of that time would have thought to appear in London society unless dressed in the corduroys of the landed proprietor. No producer or director of Hollywood could possibly be seen in public in anything but a sport coat—sport

being perhaps the one thing he does not do. There is today (1948) a new fashion appearing there much affected by the bourgeoisie of the place: an enormous jacket, obviously designed for the carrying of concealed weapons—the gangster influence.

Fashion, as what disguise one wants to assume, is also apparent in architecture. The reasonable eighteenth-century gentleman, tired of his reasonableness, sought a change in the ruder, fiercer Gothic and in a taste for ruins. There was a man in France who blew his house up with gunpowder and built another across the valley whence he could contemplate his ruins. There are ruins in England that have been blown up for the same picturesque purpose two and three times. There are Roman ruins in Paris—and very pretty they are, too—built in the eighteenth-century. Since modern governments want to appear as governmental as possible and since Rome is obviously, as any reader of Plutarch knows, the best governmental model, modern government and administration buildings always disguise themselves as the Roman Forum—not yet in ruins. Colleges, if they have a church affiliation, dress themselves up in a happy mingling of collegiate and ecclesiastical Gothic. If they are purely secular they will turn to the Georgian model so compactly reiterated by Harvard, and will repeat themselves on every countryside in brick and white-painted wooden cornice, until one is sure that the Red Coats are coming and Paul Revere will soon

ride by. Movie palaces have a tendency to affect the Moorish style, on the principle that, after all, the most satisfactory entertainment is that of the harem.

Nevertheless, I do not believe that any fashion or disguise will be accepted by everybody, unless everybody really wants it. I do not think that a fashion can be successfully imposed from above. And I am led to believe that the sled-shaped automobile, the streamlined icebox and hearse (it is pretty in French: *le corbillard aérodynamique*) are fashions popular not with the public, but with the manufacturers, who probably adopt the advanced designs for the same reason women adopt the newest thing in fashion—largely to impress themselves and one another. For when the jeep appeared, not streamlined at all but practically designed for its purpose, all the world took it to its bosom with a loud whoop.

But all this—these evidences of what a time has on its mind and these disguises people assume—is only the subject matter of fashion, not fashion itself. Fashion itself is this new set of proportions that is visible and seems right to its time. And this is the mystery: not that the thing people are looking at should change or that they should tire of the old and become interested in something new, but that the shape in which they see the new thing changes as well and even more astonishingly. The new set of proportions is not imposed by any one

authority. Its choice seems to follow no known rule or pattern. It just happens. Every ten years or so proportions change and everything that is built or done during the period is trade-marked with the same set of proportions. The ante-bellum gown of Southern society has not the proportions of 1860, but of Hollywood today. The collegiate Gothic of Duke University resembles only faintly its possible model, the church at Brou. The Harvard Business School, erected in the twenties, has completely different proportions from its model—Holden chapel, built by the same college in the eighteenth century. It even has different proportions from the former freshman dormitories, built after the identical model only thirty years ago. Examine the suburban domestic architecture built in this country during the depression years. Whether rich or poor, in brick, stone, or wood, it is all exactly alike: the same lack of cornice, the same series of interlocking rectangular parallelepipeds surmounted by the same flattened isosceles prisms, and all of exactly the same shape and proportion—a Rooseveltian style.

(The lack of cornice is characteristic of American architecture. It has to do, I suppose, with our very clear light. In France and England, where the light is softer, cornices grow to the enormous weight necessary in that foggy light to cast a shadow and make an accent. Farther south in Europe where the sun is brighter, houses are more likely to adopt the shape of simple boxes. Here in America a hair-

line on a wall will cast a sufficient shadow. The climate of New York in recent years seems to be changing; with its more numerous factories its air is becoming increasingly smoky. If this continues our new buildings will doubtless be ornamented with heavier detail.)

We built ourselves an American Embassy in Paris off the Place de la Concorde, copying a seventeenth-century hotel across the square. The architect had his model under his nose. With the help of a foot rule, a pair of dividers and a good ladder he could measure everything. Undoubtedly he did. Nevertheless when the Embassy was finished it turned out a modern American building, nothing at all like the model. Because it was impossible for the architect to copy the seventeenth-century building without correcting its proportions by the only set of proportions anybody is ever able to employ—the proportions of his time.

And this is a general truth. Whenever an epoch imitates a past style, it does so in its own characteristic proportions. A copyist, for example, will be able to make a forgery of an old master that will pass unsuspected in his own time. To a later time the fraud will appear astonishingly undeceiving. Because the forger will have been able to see only the qualities of his model that were visible to his own time, and use only the proportions that his own time was accustomed to use. These are neither the qualities and proportions the old master actually

possesses nor the qualities and proportions that a later time will attribute to it.

Since Classical and Gothic times every epoch has had artists who imitated as closely as they could the Classical and the Gothic styles. There was even in ancient Rome a pre-Phidian school of sculpture. Michelangelo, Canova, Rodin, Maillol, and our own Paul Manship all followed what they considered to be the classical Greek style. Nevertheless their work is completely unlike. For each one worked in the style of his own time. Viollet-le-Duc, the great nineteenth-century Gothic architect and restorer, rebuilt stone by stone the walled town of Carcassonne, and left it the most perfect monument, not of the medieval, but of his own age, looking to our present-day eyes more like the drawings of his contemporary, Victor Hugo, than like any of the authentic medieval monuments we are familiar with. Viollet-le-Duc restored, as well, the church of Notre Dame of Paris, and designed and placed upon its towers its celebrated gargoyles. Today these gargoyles look more like the devils that decorate an "infernal style" Montmartre night club than like any of the devils who might have actually inhabited France in the thirteenth century. Ralph Adams Cram, the American ecclesiastical architect, built an American church in Paris some years ago. In an interview to the newspapers he was quoted as saying that in his opinion the Gothic was the most beautiful of all architectural styles and that

the French was the most beautiful of all the Gothics; but that in France unfortunately there was no perfect example of the French Gothic style. So he had built them one. His building came out, indeed, a Gothic church, but scarcely in the French style. It is rather, as is natural enough, in our own American high-church Episcopalian tradition and has, I understand, even a drinking fountain. (Morris Gest once rebuilt the interior of New York's Century Theater in the Gothic style for the presentation of a devotional play, and disguised the necessary drinking fountains as baptismal fonts.) The stained-glass windows of Notre Dame of Paris, destroyed during the French Revolution, were restored by Viollet-le-Duc in what he conceived to be the style of Chartres. To us they seem transparently mid-nineteenth century—much less in the spirit of Chartres than are the paintings Roualt derived from the same material. Despite the identical source of their inspiration, the windows of Notre Dame and the paintings of Roualt are each in the style of their own particular time.

So that no matter what we paint or build, with what subject matter or in what imagined style, we work in the style of today. What we do now is not beautiful, it is what we are able to see. It is what is capable of holding our attention. And the criterion of its excellence is not that it looks beautiful, but that it looks right. It is what we are able to understand. For however much we may admire the

past, we can understand only the present. I recently heard a high-school orchestra perform an easy classical concert ending up with a modern piece. Their Beethoven was not good. The students were beginners and had not yet learned a proper way of interpreting the Romantic composition, of transposing them to the present. But when they came to Copland the students went to town. There no training in interpretation was necessary. That music they understood without preparation: it was of their time.

The present-day proportions are like the lenses of the eye. We see through them, we do not see the proportions themselves. But once tomorrow is come and the new proportions have become the normal ones, yesterday's proportions are no longer the framework of our seeing and they become themselves visible as an outlandish and absurd convention. Nor are the works executed under their canons any longer part of our time. We no longer completely understand them, no longer know what they were about. Our attention becomes fixed on their strange proportions, which we find first strange and ugly and then strange and beautiful. For, as Bacon said, there is no excellent beauty that hath not some strangeness in the proportion.

An object that has remained too long in the limbo of ugliness, in that blind spot which follows our passage through time, may often be brought out of it and made visible by changing its color or

its texture. The shock of seeing an accustomed object in a new skin will enable the eye to perceive that it has form and proportion and is perhaps well made. The nineteenth century painted all eighteenth-century furniture Trianon gray and was in that way able to see it. There was a time when all Gothic was varnished dark brown, and when the brown of Mission furniture became the symbol for the intellectual life. We painted Victorian furniture white and called it "Federal." Now it has become visible again and we can have it in any color, even its own, and call it by its right name. It is perhaps because the violin has always been in use and has always been regarded as an instrument of music and not as an object d'art that it, alone of all baroque sculpture, has never had to suffer a change of color or of surface to make it acceptable to a later world. For everything else does. Even pictures are resurfaced. Titians are skinned. Rembrandts are drowned in an aquarium of varnish. Modern pictures are made visible by the proper frames and by the painter's death.

The painter, trained as he is to see, has perceived the new proportions a little before anybody else, and as long as he is alive he keeps a little ahead of the public's seeing. Though his early pictures have by this time become strange and possibly beautiful, his present ones are only interesting. Because the pictures he is painting now are pictures of things everybody knows about or will soon be knowing

about, and are painted in the proportions everybody is using or will soon be using. Consequently, his present pictures are not beautiful or mysterious in any way. And they will in no way resemble art. That is what the cubist pictures were in our youth. They were not art but they were fun. Now they are art. Now they are what art is—the classified subject matter for academic discourse and the valuable property of 57th Street dealers—but they are somewhat duller.

While the painter is alive his work sells for one of two reasons: either because someone has a liking or a use for a particular subject and is employing the painter in his professional capacity to paint a picture of it for him, or it is because someone is speculating on the painter's death and subsequent apotheosis. Either because the painter's work pleases a client or because the painter's pictures may later become art. But once the painter is dead he cannot disappoint or surprise any more. All his work can be seen, the differences of quality become apparent, the bad pictures can be discarded, and the proper frames can be invented. As I have already pointed out, though many frames may be becoming to a picture, there is only one that will properly define the social standing, the intellectual position, and the market value of the work. As these qualities are now visible, framing is no longer a problem. The number of pictures is now limited, the market price may be established

on the basis of quality and rarity, and the paintings become art—and are justly called beautiful.

Although beauty in art may have had its origin in truth, for that is what the painter was looking at when he was at work, the actual equivalence of this beauty—which can only be measured in how much anybody wants it and is willing to pay for it—is market value.

CHAPTER 7

Money, Museums, and Merchants

*"She was going to be an opera
singer. But she got saved."*

EAST TENNESSEE LADY
EVANGELIST

PROFESSIONS can all be sorted into two broad classes, depending on whether they deal with objects or with abstract ideas. On one side are the engineer with his bridges, the mechanic with his tools, the painter with his paints and brushes, the doctor with his drugs and patients—all doing special things to particular objects, objects that can be seen, touched, handled, manipulated by the co-ordination of hand, mind, and eye. On the other side are the trades that have to do with the intangibles, things we know exist but cannot see, whose

effects we can feel, whose presence is not in time and space, but in our own minds—the spiritual values. Such is the occupation of the lawyer, who deals with those strained abstractions of our deeds and desires that can be contained in words; of the press agent, who creates esteem out of the wind; of the theologian, the spiritual leader, the newspaper man, the politician, who direct the currents of our trust. And with them goes the trade that serves the most spiritual of all values, the most abstract of all ideas, the entity that, because it can be measured, we all assume automatically and falsely to be with us here and now, as a material substance, in our pockets and in our banks, whose absence and presence affect us more than food or warmth or love itself, that has a life completely independent of our own but no existence of any sort outside our own minds—the banker and the money he counts.

Beauty in a work of art is also one of the spiritual values. For beauty is not a material attribute of any picture. It exists only in the beholder's mind. It is the measure of how desirable the work of art is to one particular person. Consequently, beauty can scarcely be said to be a universal scale. A picture or a face may be impossibly attractive to one person and to another may mean nothing at all. Money value, on the other hand, is a measure that has a more general acceptance than beauty and is more easily applied. For money value measures the number of people who find a particular sort of thing

beautiful against the number of that sort of thing there is to be sold. The sentence "the Rembrandt is beautiful" means that John Doe or Allen Smith or Thomas Aquinas, or whoever said it, wants the picture. The sentence "the Rembrandt is worth fifty thousand dollars" means that the number of people who find the Rembrandt beautiful divided by the number of Rembrandts on the market is equal to a monetary constant times fifty thousand:

$$n/m = 50,000 k$$

The picture merchant belongs on the side of the spiritual values. His job is the manipulation of my formula. For though the constant k is beyond his control—that being the occupation of the banker, the economist, the politician and the general staff— n and m , the number of people who admire the painting and the number of pictures there is to be sold can both be juggled with. A discreet use of the poets, the critics, and the literary world, a refined publicity campaign, and fictitious sales between merchants (where nothing but pictures changes hands, but prices get marked upon the books) will do wonders for n . And m can frequently be arranged by withdrawing pictures from the market, and even sometimes by a careful use of Solomon's sword.

You will notice that Rembrandt himself does not enter into my formula in any way. He has

been paid off long ago. The market value of something that is now a work of art is always a resale value. And although this value does not in general diminish, as does the resale value of an automobile, which wears out with use, neither Rembrandt nor his heirs have any advantage from the subsequent sales of his works, except to the honor of his name.

Nevertheless it is Rembrandt himself in particular and the painter himself in general who make this elaborate commerce possible. The dealer, however much he would like to, cannot create a demand. He can only make use of a demand that already exists, and the demand has as its origin the painter himself. It is the painter, while he is yet alive, who creates the nucleus for it, the nest-egg, the small number of people who begin to want his pictures. This is all the easier for him if he lives in a world where people already have the habit of picture buying. Then he will not have to waste too much of his time persuading clients and can spend more of his time painting pictures. If he is using his eyes and is worth his salt, he will be painting the world around him as he sees it at the time in which he is painting—in the present, so to speak. His friends who understand him and the people with “flair” will start buying. Now, flair is a very curious thing. It means an ability to predict the present. And very useful it is to a picture merchant, who if he has it will be able to buy cheap what he will later sell dear.

What I mean by "predicting the present" is this: a painter in a painting center is painting what is present there at that moment. That present travels from the center to the provinces. But it takes a certain time to arrive because it travels by the dissemination of the painter's works. Some varieties of the present travel faster than others. It took the cubists only about three years to cross the Atlantic. It took Cézanne almost twenty. For someone who is on the spot where the painting is being done, flair is easier to have. It only amounts to seeing (as the name would imply) what is under one's nose. But in the provinces, flair is more difficult to exercise. There it partakes of the nature of a supersensory perception—a thing that I am assured exists, but which is notoriously hard to turn to use in one's own daily living.

Nevertheless, whether in the center or in the province, whether a client collects his pictures or a merchant speculates in them, any sort of buying at all helps the painter. Nothing creates confidence in him and brings him sales as much as other sales. In fact, the only difference between the amateur painter and the professional painter is that the professional painter has sold one picture. That one sale becomes evident in all his work. The sale gives style to the picture that is sold and makes visible the style of his other works as well. There is no flattery to the painter as sincere as the act of buying a picture. No frame will point up the beauties of a paint-

ing as well as a check. Money paid down enrobes the painter in a garment of spiritual dignity, of professional excellence, of moral worth. It was a little girl who taught me this. She was sitting for her portrait and being very disagreeable. I said to her: "If you don't sit still, I won't be able to finish your picture." She said: "If you don't finish the picture, Mother won't have to pay you for it, will she?" She did not sit still. I was not able to finish the picture. Mother did not have to pay. After that I made a practice of asking for half of my fee in advance. Thus the fathers were suitably impressed, the mothers were disciplined, and the children were always remarkably well behaved.

As the body of the painter's sales grows, the public's confidence in him becomes firmer and his prices become established in a more regular manner. If this takes place in a painting center like Paris, his price quotations will have an international character. If in the provinces, his prices will be established only for that local neighborhood and the painting itself will not be exportable out of the local region.

Georgia O'Keeffe and John Marin, whose pictures command such good prices in America, and Duncan Grant and Christopher Wood, who sell for such high prices in England, are almost unknown outside of their native lands. Even the painting center itself occasionally produces figures of purely local interest. Vuillard is almost unknown outside

of France,* although Bonnard, whom he very much resembles, is known all over the world. Signac is better known in France than elsewhere although Seurat—of the same school—is everywhere celebrated. To us here the name Suzanne Valadon means nothing. But the pictures of her son, Maurice Utrillo, are in every self-respecting house in Hollywood. On the contrary both Pierre Roy and Marcel Duchamp are better known here than in France.

Countries often manufacture for home consumption products that do not travel easily or are not liked in foreign lands. This happens frequently in literature. For example, André Breton has enormous influence outside France; Paul Éluard, of the same age and of the same school, is much admired in France and known only as a name elsewhere. Leon-Paul Fargue, Max Jacob, Mallarmé (save only for *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, which after all we only know as a piece of music) José-Maria Heredia, Richépin and a score of others, are unknown out of France; but Verlaine and Baudelaire have traveled very well. Maurice Rostand and Jean Cocteau have almost equal reputations in Paris. Rostand is unknown abroad. Cocteau travels because of his association with "la mode." Writers are often exported for reasons different from those which make them interesting at home. Anatole France is admired in France for his conversion to

* Still somewhat true.

socialism, Balzac for his picture of French society; but in foreign lands they are read as scandalous, even as dirty, authors. Just as in somewhat the same way the red wine of the Burgundy region is exported as a sweet wine to Germany and as a sparkling wine to Britain.

However firmly, nevertheless, the painter's prices are established, as long as he is alive the n/m factor of my formula is subject to variations. The painter may "lose his talent" (the thing itself seldom happens; the phrase means "go out of style") or he may flood the market. Until the n/m factor is somewhat fixed and made constant by the painter's death and apotheosis, his market prices—not his fees as a professional man, but the value of his works on the picture exchange—are liable to uncertainty.

Against this uncertainty, many painters have in these last decades provided themselves an artificial death and a premature apotheosis. Marcel Duchamp, one of the greatest cubists, stopped painting entirely many years ago. Although he is himself a poor man, the market value of his work is tremendous, and I seem to see every three or four years a picture of his I had not known before. Picasso, like his musical counterpart, Stravinsky, employs the formula of a complete change of style every several years. The pictures of any particular period are known and numbered, and the market prices cannot be upset by additions. Giorgio di Chirico died against his will. His early work is as much

admired as his later work is disdained, and he has recently been in serious legal trouble charged with forging pictures in his early style.

In France there is a customary device of apotheosis by steps that is well understood and practiced. The canonization department of French picture buying has three heavens. The lowest one, whence comes the rain and the hail (and where sometimes pass the minor deities), is the Petit Palais. There, or in similar halls, painters who are beginning to be known are exhibited under semi-official government patronage. The middle heaven, the Luxembourg,* is the Elysian fields. There abide the heroes, yet alive or but recently dead, awaiting the confirmation of their immortality. The firmament of the sun and the eternal stars is the Musée du Louvre, which houses the great and immortal dead. Thus three stages of apotheosis: promise, fulfillment, and masterpiece.

The Museum of Modern Art in New York is just such a machine for apotheosis. It tries to contain all three stages under one roof, but existing as it does, so far away from its sources, it finds the necessary exercise of flair, the forecasting of the present, as difficult and as uncertain as the forecasting of the future. Consequently it works best among artists already known by everybody to be great. Although it tries to atone for its lack of

* Now the Jeu de Paume.

flair, normal enough in the provinces, by a certain academic seriousness and a scholarly approach to modern art, it is not really in on the ground floor. So it is likely to pick as winners the runners who most resemble the winners of the past when, as everybody knows, the masterpieces of today will differ in every possible way from those of yesterday and will not even look like art. The museum functions best as a hall of fame for the recently dead, a library of films, and a center for industrial design.

Most of the provincial museums, since they must take as models one of the three steps of apotheosis, imitate the Louvre. And they do it very well. The pictures will be cleaner, better hung and better lighted than those of their illustrious prototype. For the provincial museum is probably newer and has fewer restrictions and younger minds. Although their setup provides for no Petit Palais or Luxembourg, they are, nevertheless, likely to feel a certain responsibility toward contemporary painting, and will have a certain amount of money to spend on its purchase and collection. And that they do less well. They have little contact with painting as it is made. Their training is scholarly and traditional, all about painting that has already become art. Consequently, they are confused by the lack of authoritative scholarship in the contemporary field, and are easily influenced by organized publicity. They are accustomed to the firmly estab-

lished values of the old masters and find themselves very much out of their element among the jumpy market prices of modern pictures. Consequently, they will buy the most expensive on the assumption that the most expensive are the most sure. In this way they can also get rid of their funds quickest, and will be forced to make up their minds, say, only three times instead of fifteen. So the cellars of the provincial museums fill up with the discarded modern acquisitions of former years. More wisely they often refuse to buy modern pictures at all but will accept them as gifts, thus putting the responsibility for the possibly doubtful taste of the purchases on the shoulders of their benefactors.

The most useful service any museum can render the painter is, of course, to exhibit his pictures. A friend of mine once defined a painter as a man who lived in a studio and sent pictures to shows. This is not entirely true. Many painters do not live in studios. But all painters send pictures to shows. Showing his pictures is very important to the painter. Even by showing them to a casual visitor he can see them through other eyes, find out how his work looks to a stranger, get an idea of what a picture will be like when it is finished. No picture, however, is ever really finished until it is sold. At that point it ceases to be a part of the painter's private life. It has become public, external, something he can no longer paint on or fiddle

with. The painter can look at it as if he were a cold outsider and make up his mind whether he likes it or not. Public exhibitions perform somewhat the same service for him. The pictures are framed, on a wall, looked at by a varied public. The painter can see his work through the spectators' eyes, judge his pictures' style and carrying power, find out what they are all about. After that he can go home and paint something different.

The sort of exhibition all painters prefer is the one-man show. Here the painter will present all his presentable work of the preceding two or three years. The one-man show, however, runs the danger of being monotonous, because the painter will have been occupied since his last one-man show in painting different aspects of the same picture. And all the pictures of the exhibition, with all their superficial variety, will be fundamentally the same. A well-staged group show of two or three painters whose work combines and contrasts properly is always more varied and more interesting. A more common formula is the big show—the salon, the independents, the Carnegie and so on. Here the painter has a rather special painting problem.

Under ordinary circumstances an easel painter when he paints a picture has in mind a room in a private house as its final home. For that end he will paint his picture with a focusing distance of six to ten feet (that is to say, that the picture is to look its best from that distance), he will design it to be

as interesting as possible for as long a time as possible (it must be lived with; it will be looked at again and again), and he will try to make it as little upsetting as possible to the decoration of the room where it will go—a room that will certainly have been decorated long before the introduction of the painter's picture. All this is a question of making an intricate and subtle pattern with not too much insistence on broad masses or striking colors. Such a picture, however, will be completely lost in any big show. So the painter who paints with the big exhibitions in mind must do just the contrary—he must paint a large picture with a focusing distance of fifteen to thirty feet, in strong colors and simple masses, and with a pattern that can be quickly understood. Subtlety and hidden charms are not very useful: the picture will not be seen very often, and it must be possible to understand all of its qualities at a glance. He must make something that can be seen from across the room and that will shout out any other picture on the wall. The product is naturally unsuited for private purchase, and if sold can only find a home in a museum, a very special market. I do not mean to imply that pictures painted with the big expositions in mind are in any way inferior to any other sort of pictures. It is simply that they belong to a special kind of painting intended not to be lived with but to be seen among other pictures in a large room and from a great distance—to the genre “masterpiece.”

Carrying power and high visibility are perfectly legitimate technical problems that any painter should be able to tackle. But the problems presented by the sort of exhibition sponsored by a business corporation are less legitimate. In an exhibition of this sort, the prize-winning pictures will be reproduced in booklets and catalogues. This literature, together with publicity about the exhibition, will be used to persuade the public that the company which has organized the show is benevolent, disinterested, cultured, and liberal. Consequently, the actual problem of the painter who competes is the problem of painting for reproduction. Neither paint quality nor carrying power is important for this. Paint quality cannot be seen through the medium of a color print, and carrying power is not necessary in a catalogue that will be looked at from only a reading distance. The subject matter and its arrangement on the canvas are the only things that count—the only things that will withstand reproduction. The more sensational the exhibition proves to be, the more publicity the company will obtain. Consequently, the more violent and the more shocking (within, of course, the limits of sexual respectability) is the subject of the painter's picture, the more likely he is to win a prize. So that painting for an exhibition sponsored by big business offers something that is more of the nature of a moral problem for a poet than of a technical problem for a painter.

Be that as it may, the big show is an admirable institution and a useful outlet for the painter, provided that its entry is either open to all, as are the "independent" shows, or by invitation, as the Philadelphia Academy show used to be. But the jury show (where a jury that also awards the prizes decides whether the work submitted is good enough to be included in the exhibition) is an imposition on the painter and a menace to his already insecure position as master of his own profession. That a jury should award prizes is perfectly proper and nobody objects to it. God makes the rain to fall also upon the sea. But the invitation to submit his work, as if he were a student standing an examination, to a body of puzzled laymen or of certainly hostile other painters, no mature or self-respecting artist can accept. He is asked to deprive himself of his most important piece of work at a time when it is possibly more useful for him to have it on hand, to buy it a frame, and, if he does not live where the exhibition is to be held, to pay for its packing, shipping, and insurance—all in the vague hope of a prize and in the almost certainty of having his picture returned to him at his own expense, unhung. He is sticking his neck out, and he has no assurance whatsoever that the headsman's ax will fall for any responsible reasons. Here I step out of my role and make a special plea to the trade. We, as painters, must not so carelessly abandon our professional sovereignty. No self-respecting member of

the painting profession should allow himself to be persuaded to submit his work to the judgment of any jury for admission to any show.

As I have said before, a painter either makes his living as a professional man working for a clientele or he is supported and encouraged as a possible and future gold mine by a dealer and his clients. This last is where the glamour lies, and many a painter quietly painting the local gentry in a small town, or unhappy in an advertising agency, or even being rich and painting at home, longs for the big time, to be quoted on the stock exchange, to have his name in light, to become a style and an institution. Hungry for fame, he cries, "Where can I get a dealer?" I do not know, for the dealer is a very rare bird, combining, as he must, the best qualities of the clairvoyant, the devoted friend, the bunko steerer, and the stock-market manipulator. When painting is bought for its subject matter a dealer is not needed; he is nothing but a simple go-between, and the painter himself, or his wife, generally has enough business acumen to get along without him. But when painting is bought for its future as art, the dealer is as necessary as the press agent for the actress, the slogan for the cigarette. The models and predecessors of our present-day dealers were Durand-Ruel and Ambroise Vollard, who saw the possibilities of the unknown impressionists and made a fortune out of them, through whose hands passed all the great of their time, whose flair was im-

peccable, whose faith immense. A present-day dealer, however good, is likely to be less catholic. His career will probably follow something of this pattern: as a youth he will have fallen in love with the works of a small group of painters, all only slightly older than himself, and whose painting has been to him a revelation, a conversion to art. And he will spend all the rest of his life in their company. If he takes on a new painter, it will be one whose work resembles what he already loves. It will be a substitute, an addition, something to eke out a meatless day. He will be more faithful to his first love. So, painter, if you want a dealer, pick him young and train him yourself.

But that is probably not the way it will happen. Your friends will buy your work. Knowing you, they will see in your pictures qualities no one else can perceive. As your friends grow older they will become more important and their importance will give you prestige and, consequently, sales. Your clientele will grow exactly as does a doctor's practice. Eventually a dealer will take you over, not to impose you on his own clientele, but to act as messenger between you and the faithful you already have. You will be loved for yourself alone, and every sale will bring your other loves. For nothing is admired as much as something for which money has been paid. Advertising will do you no good, however gratifying it may be to you to see your name in print. For you are in a field where

everyone fears that every critic is venal and every favorable notice bought, and where no one will take the word even of his best friend but listens to the oracle of some small interior voice, seeking to divine where next the cat will jump. A good reputation in the art magazines will sell a few pictures to the museums, but that is a special and a limited public. And no one but the painter himself ever reads his notices in the daily press. A householder will invest in a Picasso because he knows that all his friends know very well that Picasso is the best. And Picasso's signature is always written very large and clear. But you do not have behind you, as he has, all the forces of modern salesmanship, or all the minds that invented, or all the prestige of modern poetry, either. Nor are you likely to have. Glory such as his, next time it is attained, will be for other reasons; nor can you predict its future nature.

Remember how it happened last time. Who for twenty years from 1870 to 1890 was the undisputed lord of painting? Whose work brought the highest prices? Whose painting of flesh was to all the world the most exquisite revelation of young loveliness the world had ever seen? Who, with his imitators, dominated the schools and furnished the saloons and barrooms of far away Idaho and Turkey and Peru with gorgeous replicas of melting and languid and sumptuous nakedness? Who was it that educated the public, controlled the exhibitions, and kept the impressionists and the great Cézanne him-

self in an abject and indignant obscurity? Who was it ~~then~~ who was the cock of the walk? It was Bouguereau.

The present-day world has almost forgotten he even existed. His pictures are hung in the obscure garrets of museums, or are shown in private homes, a little laughingly, as the vagaries of yesterday's taste. Almost no one remembers his name. The present cock of the walk has different feathers. It is a little late now to try to join his flock. Nor do I think it is possible to foresee in what plumage the phoenix will next arise. All we can know is that it will be very fine feathers indeed. It has always been so in the past.

Therefore, painter, unhappy as you may be and hungry for fame, the best you can do for yourself is to sit tight and keep your eyes open and trust your friends. Perhaps the phoenix plumes they think they see on you are really there.

CHAPTER 8

Modern Art

*"Did you get that motorcycle so
you could deliver your pictures
on it?"*

WESTERN UNION BOY
ON BICYCLE

I WAS very young—it was in 1913—when modern art came to America. It shot up before our delighted eyes like a skyrocket, scattering fire balls and splendors—Picasso and Picabia, Duchamp and Brancusi, Kandinsky, Marc, and Metzinger, and a score of others. It was better than any circus. In a time of brilliant new fashions and new dances—the Castles and their Walk, the Maxixe, the Half-and-Half—there was discovered to us a fabulous new land that had for its national anthem *Too Much Mustard*, for its prophet Guillaume Apollinaire, for its professional bad boy Picabia, writing dirty words

on his pictures in pieces of string, for its Alexander the Great, Picasso, and for its Columbus and Leonardo, Marcel Duchamp, the handsomest man on two continents.

Everybody knew about modern art. Alfred Stieglitz organized his own American cenacle with the best of the local contingent. The War came and passed. We hung on our walls prints by Matisse and Klee, read *Tender Buttons* to each other and whooped with laughter over:

CHICKEN

*Alas a dirty word, alas a dirty third alas
a dirty third, alas a dirty bird.*

We took *Dada* to our hearts, finding the young Tristan Tzara silly but fun, as he was, the Erik Satie witty and very fascinating, as he still is. And we all knew about it. We knew about it almost as soon as it had happened. Picasso's earliest cubist pictures are dated 1909. They were shown here in 1913, all of fifty years ago. His discoveries, though it is a disputed point whether they are his or Braque's, have been with us almost two generations.

Nothing has changed much since. The school that can with justice be called abstract art can scarcely be called modern. It is no longer advanced; it is not even contemporary. Its inventors and their disciples, if alive, are now all elderly men. It has its saints, its martyrs, its shrines, its pilgrimages, its schools of theology and discipline, and even its Sun-

day schools for children. But now that its sanctity is so well attested, its theology so universally accepted, and its disciplines so unescapably taught, one inclines to be a little impatient with it. It has become too easy to do.

What makes modern art different from the art of the past is that it is based on the combination of two nineteenth-century discoveries—the one in the realm of technique and having to do with the unity of the paint surface of a picture, and the other in the realm of subject matter and having to do with the use of past styles as a subject matter for painting. Both discoveries had been known to everybody for some time. But Braque or Picasso or somebody else in Paris about 1907 combined the two, and out of that union came modern art.

The technical discovery had already been made by the impressionists. It is the doctrine of unified surface tension—that no matter what illusion of depth or space or reality a picture gives, a picture is after all an object and every square centimeter of that object must be equally interesting. Unified surface tension is the basis and characteristic of all good design of our time, from Degas to Le Corbusier, from Chanel to the jet. (Francis Rose, the painter, once said to me, pulling out of his pocket a flat tin of Luckies in red and gold and green: “How beautiful that would be if it were only by Chanel.” But that does not really belong in this

place, for it is a story, not about modern art, but about modern advertising.)

Before the impressionists, it was enough if the image—the various objects depicted on the canvas—was well composed. The impressionists discovered that the surface of the picture must be composed as well, that the texture of the paint itself must be made interesting. The size, shape, and direction of the brush strokes must not depend under any circumstances on the size or modeling of the object depicted or on its position in the picture. They must depend only on considerations of unity of paint surface. One must be conscious of the picture as an object, as a flat surface covered with paint. Cocteau expressed it by saying that after all a picture is not a window. It would be more proper to say that a picture must be both a flat surface and a window. No matter what indication of depth is made, holes must never be left that might interfere with the unity of the paint surface. Textures and paint qualities may be used to tie the image to the surface of the canvas. That is why Braque mixed sand with his paint and why Picasso painted with newsprint and paper cutouts. To achieve more completely this unity of surface, even their image itself may be sacrificed. This unity of paint surface is the key, the touchstone, the difference between the new pictures and the old. And a picture is a modern picture in exactly the measure that it possesses an equalized surface tension.

The wife of a picture collector, to whom in those more heroic days I had just been introduced as a young painter, said immediately: "Do you paint in sand?" And when I admitted that I did not, she turned and left me without a word. Because if I did not paint in sand I could not be modern, and I had entered her house under false pretenses. But modern or not modern, neither I nor anyone else can possibly have painted in our time without having had to face, and to solve as well as we could, the problem of equalized surface tension.

The ideological discovery behind modern art is that the evocation of a particular style of painting can itself be a subject for a picture. A painter can distill in an alembic, as it were, a school of painting, abstract from it its basic characteristics, and present them on canvas as a concentrated and superior essence—an essential oil of art. The idea was discovered, I think, but not fully exploited, by the English pre-Raphaelites. A group of earnest young men, motivated by the greatest respect for the best in art and the highest principles of morality, they took as their theme the painting of Orcagna and Benozzo Gozzoli, which, I understand, none of them had at that time yet seen. The ladies of Shalott, their Gawains and Guineveres and Lancelots, were not actually their subject matter. Their subject matter was rather how Benozzo Gozzoli or Filippo Lippi would have treated these great figures if those painters had had the immense good for-

tune to have been acquainted with Tennyson's version of Malory and with Victoria's sobriety and good taste. Their subject was the evocation of the past. Their criterion for the excellence of their workmanship was how near it approached its composite and medieval model. Holman Hunt even invented an antiquarian way of painting in the oils that were not used in the period he was emulating. By laying down a thick coat of white lead on his canvas, smoothing it out like plaster on a wall, and painting into it while it was still wet with soft brushes and in drawing strokes, he could pretend that he was working in fresco.

But all this school was occupied with the emulation of only one model. We, on the other hand, may depict a variety of styles. Picasso has developed this idea elaborately, and taking as his subject a number of styles, each in turn, he has produced both pictures and a career of unparalleled brilliance. His early still lifes and cubist pictures evoke the essential forms and the multiple points of view and shifting perspectives of the mature Cézanne. The famous portrait of Gertrude Stein is a transition piece. It imposes on a Cézannesque body a head derived from Negro sculpture. (Picasso, after a number of sittings, was not satisfied with the head and took the picture to the country with him. There he finished it without the model. During that summer he began his next period, the one centered on the *Ladies of Avignon*, all about the Negro

sculpture of the African west coast. As a result, the head of the portrait came out in the later style and quite different from the body.) The newer cubism of 1917, the *Harlequins* and so on, is a pictured representation of the costumes he had made for Erik Satie's ballet *Parade*, which evoked walking New York skyscrapers. There is a period of fat ladies whose weighty curves are derived from the classicism of Ingres and from the frescoes of Pompeii. The more recent sun-faced figures and women with two heads come certainly from an inspection of early Italian and Spanish tarot cards and the Byzantine frescoes of his own Catalonia. Very little uncertainty remains any more what his pictures are about. The objects depicted are for the most part plainly visible and what the titles say they are. There is even a sculptured head in bronze that is, plane by plane, the exact replica of the subject of several of his more disintegrated paintings. But his actual subject has never been, since the jugglers and mountebanks of his blue period, the objects on his canvas. His subject is rather how some particular school or race or time would have envisaged those objects.

Marcel Duchamp, too, comes out of the evocation of the style of Cézanne. But his work is not yet, even now, completely explained. His titles would lead one to suppose that his pictures have a futurist tendency, that is to say, depicting motion. I have looked at them often and long, and

though they are in my opinion the most beautiful, perfect, and extraordinary of all cubist painting, I can see in them neither nudes nor bachelors. And I am inclined to believe that his names for his pictures are a sly wit, like his surrealist post card—the photograph of a sealed flask containing exactly (and since it is by Duchamp I am sure it is exactly) fifty cubic centimeters of the air of Paris and whose contour, taken together with its shadow, brings to the mind the shape of the human bottom.

Paul Klee, one of the finest abstract painters and one of the few modern Germanic artists—he was Swiss—of any great interest to the West, seems to have specialized in the ideology and perspective found in the drawings of children, and in doodlings associated with bushman churingas—those stones with labyrinthine designs supposed to contain the soul. He is the only one of the European moderns whose major work is not in oil. His color is superb; his titles are curious and amusing.

Albert Gleizes made a system of scholastic training out of cubism, wrote textbooks on how the disintegration by multiple perspective was to be performed, and painted enormous pictures to demonstrate it. Braque followed or preceded Picasso in many of his periods, and it is always a disputed point which of the two invented some of the modes. André Derain, who invented a sort of naïve village sign-painter's style derived perhaps from some of the more wooden of the Cézanne portraits, scarcely

belongs among the abstract painters, nor do the other moderns who have followed the different aspects of Cézanne or elaborated on the Fauvism of Matisse.

There is a later group of men who are apparently occupied with experiments in shape and proportion alone. There is the late Mondriaan, much admired by the architects and industrial designers on account of the perfection of his rectangular proportions. And Hans Arp whose titles are joking and obscure enough (at one time he was exclusively occupied with the subject of bottles and navels), but who in my opinion is one of the greatest living sculptors. Generally, however, in all modern pictures there is an object depicted, though just what it is is sometimes difficult to determine on account of the obscurity of the painting style or on account of a purposely misleading title.

That is abstract art. And though I have not attempted to make a complete list of the abstract painters—that can be found in textbooks—you will notice from even the few examples I have cited that abstract painting has little to do with abstract idea. It is rather a transposition of the basic pictorial subject matter of painting—a change of key, so to speak—into a more remote plane. It is the evocation of an art style of the past or the depiction of an object clearly enough for the painter, the identity of which, however, is a secret not always shared with the spectator.

Despite its apparent obscurity, abstract art, since its inception, has had the firmest support of the intellectual world. This would lead one to suspect that the subject matter of abstract painting—the evocation of a variety of different painting styles—is a poetic device; and that the abstract painter is as much interested in illustrating a poetic idea for the poets and keeping them amused as he is in solving his own visual problems.

The other branch of modern art practiced by the younger painters had a more frankly poetic subject matter. In this school were Salvador Dali, Max Ernst, Eugène Berman, Pavel Tchelitchew, to mention only a few. Like the poetic painting of all times, this school had the enthusiastic support of literary men, specialists in the field who defended, and often directed, its iconography. You will remember how Huysmans found in the works of Gustave Moreau a perfect depiction of the romantic decay and made him the favorite painter of his *fin de siècle* aesthete, des Esseintes, hero of *A Rebours*. And how to the critic John Ruskin, the pre-Raphaelites were an exemplary reappearance in England of the medieval skill, guild, and past. Both subjects, romantic decay and medieval revival, were of immense interest to the rich of that time, engrossed as they were with the proper education and suitable housing of their souls—the late-romantic soul needing for its cultivation the practice of travel and luxury, and the sentiments of love and

despair. The poetic painters of our own day have preferred as subjects either the young of the poor, or the fables of dream interpretation—both subjects pleasing to the rich of our own time, who find nothing as touching as the contemplation of poverty from a reasonable distance, and nothing as expensive and impressive as the analyst's couch.

The poetry of the poor came out of Picasso's early pictures of a juggler's family and formed the principal subject of Pavel Tchelitchew and Christian Bérard. Eugène Berman's subject was a nostalgia for an Italianate past rather than poverty, although there is generally a beggar in rags somewhere in his pictures. The poet Gertrude Stein was one of his first influential admirers, and his greatest success has been in New York. Tchelitchew, the finest draughtsman of his generation, admitted a certain evidence of sex in his clowns and children. His poetic backing was the Sitwells and his great success in London. Bérard, discovered and advertised by Jean Cocteau and best known in France, endowed his personages with a moody tenderness. More accomplished as a draughtsman and designer than as a painter in oils, his success in theatre design and fashion overshadowed his reputation as an artist and little of his oil painting has crossed the Atlantic. Nevertheless, of the three painters it is he who stems most directly from the early Picasso.

Freudian mythology has been treated by any number of figures. The most celebrated over here—

not counting Picasso himself—are Max Ernst, Yves Tanguy, and Salvador Dali. However neither Ernst nor Tanguy is a pure case. Ernst, who has the most extraordinary invention of textures and paint quality of our time, paints by preference minor magics and small Germanic demons. Some of his most beautiful work has been done as an evocation of the style of nineteenth-century wood-engraved book illustration. Such is his *Woman with a Hundred Heads*. Tanguy, an almost purely abstract painter and a very good one indeed, ties the Freudian subject matter to his pictures by means of a series of provocative titles. (A picture that looks like a small explosion on a beach is called *Mama, Papa is Wounded*.) Dali, however, does paint dream interpretation. As a young man new in Paris, he received much help from the surrealist group. The surrealists, contrary to popular belief, are not a painting movement at all, but a purely literary manifestation. They still exist,* are still organized and directed by the French poet, André Breton, and are still occupied with the same things they were occupied with in 1924—the excessive metaphor in poetry, the use of the unconscious mind and automatic writing in literary composition, and the political theories of Leon Trotsky. They have always had some painters with them, more as private illustrators than as leading members of the party. Dali

* And still exist today.

was made much of by them until his desertion and excommunication about 1939. Whereupon he became his own poet and his own press agent. (The surrealists in the meantime became artists themselves and manufactured "gratuitous surrealist objects," which they offered for sale.) Dali's painting technique comes by way of the academic painters of Madrid straight out of Holman Hunt, Burne-Jones, and the other English pre-Raphaelites. It is clean, minute, precise, and detailed and is apt to look like a miniature landscape in a vacuum bottle. His variations on his subject, Freudian symbolism, are of extraordinary luxuriance. His situation, of being at the same time both painter and poet, is somewhat the same as that of Giorgio di Chirico, and it is only by the most astute tightrope walking, addressing himself by methods of high pressure salesmanship to a richer and more innocent public than Chirico himself could reach, that he has escaped the same fate.

Chirico's case is an appalling one. He is a painter of great talent and extraordinary gifts. His book *Hebdromeros* is one of the curiosities of modern French literature. His painting itself is mostly concerned with a strange mixture of Roman antiquity, eighteenth-century grandeur, and the domestic household objects of his Italian childhood. He was heralded by Cocteau and acknowledged a great painter by all the world. In 1929 he designed for the ballet the sets and costumes of his superb *Le Bal*.

There he put all of his poetic symbols: his gladiators, his seas in the drawing-room, his horses, his dress-model women, his astrologers. Tired of them, I suppose, he began to paint another subject. It was decided that he had lost his talent. He was thereupon driven out. He has never come back.

It is a curious and unexplained fact that the poetic painter succeeds in stage design as no one else can, perhaps because he has acquired a facility for illustrating poetic ideas. Christian Bérard was, I should imagine, the greatest stage designer of his time. His sets and costumes, simple, unpretentious and elegant, were unforgettable. So were Florine Stettheimer's sets and costumes for the opera *Four Saints*. I have already spoken of Chirico's *Le Bal*. The Russian Ballet itself was beautiful and loved in a great measure because of the sets and costumes that the poetic painters made for it. Tchelitchev's dramatic use on the stage of lights and shadows and plain colors was unlike anything else anywhere. Dali's staging and side shows are still the most amusing of carnivals. And Eugène Berman's opera sets are so sumptuous that there is no need—or sometimes even room—in them for actors. It is also curious that painters who are not painting an explicit poetic imagery are not interested in designing for the stage at all. Leonid, closely associated with these painters, but whose painting has only the poetry implicit in landscape, has never done a stage set.

The serious objection that can be made to poetic

painting is that it inspires little technical advance. New poetic imagery is obscure enough in itself, and it can always be expressed more easily and more easily comprehended if it is depicted—without the added obscurities of an advanced painting technique as well—in one of the already familiar painting techniques of the past. It was the impressionists who made the technical discoveries of the nineteenth century, not Gustave Moreau. He only practiced with an antiquarian hand and an embroiderer's skill the glazes and scumbles of another day. It is Whistler's painting, awkward and faulty as it may perhaps be, that we find interesting today, not Rossetti's. For Whistler in his imitation was using a contemporary, an advanced model. Rossetti was retreating into the quiet of a make-believe past. The painting of Holman Hunt is an impasse leading to nothing. And Dali himself has been able to make no improvement on his master's appalling dryness.

There is another objection to poetic painting, especially if the painter is his own poet—that it is bad for the painter's peace of mind. He who practices it must be in constant fear of going out of style. Poetic painting is like placer mining. The painter may at any moment exhaust one pocket and then must spend worried weeks and months and years looking for another. And he has little assurance that the next pocket, if he does find one, will hold anything but a glittering fool's gold.

The life of the poetic image is short. It quickly becomes unfashionable and seldom, if ever, is revived as anything but a scholarly curiosity. The poetic image in poetry itself often becomes ridiculous soon after its invention. Think of Richard Crashaw's *Weeper* where the Magdalen's eyes are described as:

*"Two walking baths, two weeping motions,
Portable and compendious oceans."*

Or where, when a cherub has drunk of her tears,

*"his song,
Tastes of his breakfast all day long."*

Very elegant at the time, I am sure, but now practically a Donald Duck. And since the poetic image is for the painter only subject matter, only an excuse for painting, it is neither part of that general wealth of the world to which he is always busy adding, nor part of that new vision of the world which he is always busy seeing. The poetic image is only an idea, and the progress of its degeneration is fast. What begins as a style of painting becomes first stylized and then stylish. What begins as a proposition in ethics becomes first a mode in decoration and then a technique in advertising. How quickly did pre-Raphaelism sink through Burne-Jones to Beardsley and posters, cubism

through the decorative style of a world's fair to triangular pedestals for the display of merchandise! How quickly did surrealism become perfume bottles and shop windows! No dress designer, I am sure, could find the inspiration for a fetching hat in the painting of Cézanne. But then Cézanne would not submit to the patronage of Zola either.

And that, I think, is the whole point—all the strength and weakness of modern art. Why it has conquered the world and why nevertheless its conquest is not a victory. Why, wonderful as we all know it to be, however sound the ideas and technical discoveries behind are, it still seems somewhat frivolous. Why Picasso himself so seldom paints as carefully as his subject could require. Why, after all these years, the great public has never accepted it, and to this day cannot visit one of its sanctuaries without thinking of Hans Christian Anderson's parable of the Emperor's new clothes. It is because when abstract painting was born it was taken over by the intellectual world. Modern art has been weaned and reared and ruled by the poets.

CHAPTER 9

Poets and Parasites

"My mother wants me to be an artist. But heck, I can't draw. I can't draw anything. I can't even draw myself."

LITTLE GIRL SPECTATOR

WHEN a painter has an exhibition that sells, a novelist publishes a book that is read, or a playwright puts on a successful show, he is in danger of being very unhappy for quite some time. For he is awed by his success, and day and night he has running through his mind the words: "That was good. Can I do it again?" and "What will I do next?" And he can't do anything. His success has turned him inside out. He is seeing himself from the outside. And he won't be able to work until he is back inside his own skin again. Sometimes a rest cure will do the trick—or an un-rest cure. Sometimes he just has to wait until his success dies down and he is no

longer famous and impressed by it. If he is too young or if the success lasts too long, he may never recover. He may be permanently sterilized, or he may be forced to repeat all his life that same play, that same picture, or that same book.

This is particularly true when his public acclaim is not accepted by the esteem of his own professional body. Then the artist knows that he can not repeat his success because it was due to an accident that has nothing to do with his professional training. He knows that he cannot possibly guess again where the cat will jump, and he is horribly scared. And well he may be. For the advance guards of culture heartily despise the man who has once failed them.

The most unhappy of them all during an attack of success is the painter. For within his own professional body he has little natural support. Whatever painter he actually knows as a man, he always loves, having with him the common ground of painting materials. (Just as the French of the most different social classes can always get together on the subjects of cooking, sex, or military service.) But the painter he does not know, he always fears, too conscious of the other's different approach to the visual world and of the rivalries engendered by the preferences of the poets and by the smallness of the market. And a solitary painter standing alone on the pinnacle of success is in a dangerous place—nowhere to go but down, and with no friendly hand to steady him.

That is why painters always live in groups: Picasso, Braque, Derain, Van Dongen, and so on—Monet, Renoir, Manet, and so on—Bellows, Glackens, Luks, Henri, Prendergast, and so on. You cannot name a painter who was successful during his lifetime and who had a long and varied professional career who did not have around him in the most intimate relationship as personal friends or as personal enemies other painters painting the same sort of things—an active group whose combined work made a professional background against which his own painting could be judged. That small home support, in lieu of the general approval of the big professional body, which of course he cannot have, enables the painter to know that his work is all right and no accident. Then he can face success without fear. But the solitary worker, neither attached to a professional group working out the same problems nor embroiled with a professional enemy in quarrels about who did it first—the Cézanne, the Harnett—has either no acclaim at all during his lifetime or lives in constant fear that the cat may jump somewhere else, that tomorrow he may wake up without talent—talent being in that sense a subject matter approved of by the intellectual world.

I am sure that in former times the painter did not bother about his talent at all, and that the mark of a good painter was that he was approved of, not by the intellectual world, but by his own guild. But when talent becomes confused with subject matter,

or—as nowadays—with novelty, the intellectual world can step in and assume the right of final judgment on painters and painting. Today the right to sanction a painter's claim to talent has been taken even out of the hands of the intellectual world. It has been usurped by the poets as their own peculiar right. And now the solitary painter is at the mercy of the poets who exploit his product without having any responsibility whatsoever to safeguard its production. So the poets, by the authority they now exercise as arbiters of talent, can seriously interfere with the painter's normal working life.

The normal working life of a painter is this: He gets a new idea. It may be any one of a great many different sorts of things—painting in an unexpected size or in a different sort of texture or with a new sort of composition, or a different combination of colors, or any new way at all of painting any variety of subject. The new idea will probably first appear, rather clumsily treated, in the midst of a group of quite another sort of work. Then the painter will become interested in the new idea and for a while paint nothing else. He will do it over and over, again and again, each time more skillfully, in different ways, sizes, and pictures, until he has mastered it. Whereupon he will get another idea. The ideas are not too frequent. There may not be more than three or four of them in a lifetime. But the new idea is the subject of those biennial

shows which painters are so fond of giving. That is why all the pictures in a one-man show are likely to have a certain family resemblance. They are actually the same picture, and the group of pictures painted around the same idea is what is known as the painter's period.

Acquiring a new painting skill is also a very slow process. The painter must slip up on a new skill as if he were trailing a fox. I once heard Leonid explain how he mastered figure painting. One day he found he had painted quite convincingly a minute fisherman on a distant beach in one of his seacoast pictures. Then he did it again, in another picture. Little by little—and it took several years—he contrived to make his figures larger and nearer, until finally he arrived at painting figures in the foreground in front of a distant landscape. That is the way something new must always be taken into painting. A new skill cannot be adopted suddenly. It must be worked at, over and over, until it is thoroughly digested and has become another equally unobtrusive part of the painter's other skills.

If the painter permits them, the poets will seriously interfere with both of these processes—the acquisitions of new skills and the sequence of his new ideas. The poets will make the painter force himself, go too fast, bite off more than he can chew, exploit his minor mannerisms. If under the poets' guidance his show is a success it will not be because the painter has solved some pictorial problem, which

the poets know nothing about and are not interested in, but because he has illustrated for them some ethical doctrine, praiseworthy enough, no doubt, but not really to the point. Since the poets actually do control publicity and can make that elaborate, modern, fearsome magic work, the painter who is aided by the poets is himself in danger. For a solitary painter alone among the poets, awed by them and dazzled by his too quick, too precarious success, based not on his professional qualities but on his poetic imagery, may get his working eye gummed up and stop being able to see. He may even have to become a poet himself.

It is evident that the great painting successes of our time have all had to do with poets. Picasso had behind him Apollinaire, Gertrude Stein, Max Jacob, Jean Cocteau, Paul Eluard, André Breton, to name only a few. It is to be remembered that Picasso's subject—the evocation of a variety of styles—is intellectually very respectable, more powerful as a subject than either tenderness, antiquarianism, or psychological nostrums, and is eminently acceptable to the literary world. Bérard had behind him the great poet-and-press-agent, Jean Cocteau; and Tchelitchew, the weight of a whole family of poets and publicists, the Sitwells. Dali was for a long time the darling of the surrealists, a complete college of poets. Our own Action painters undoubtedly owe much of their present eminence

to the guidance in æsthetics and publicity furnished them by André Breton during the war years he passed among us. The reviewing staffs of our two major trade journals—the *Arts* and the *Art Digest*—are composed almost entirely of younger poets who report the current art shows in a form of parallel poetry, derived by free association of ideas from the works in question, and very confusing to the average gallery goer.

However this may be, I nevertheless do not think that you can name a single well-known modern painter who has not had some poet behind him. This is because the poets today have a profession but no business. Poets cannot write about science or metaphysics, as did Lucretius, for the professional scientist knows more about science than they do, and no one at all reads metaphysics. Poetry has even been driven from the stage; there is no dramatic poetry, and although plays are frequently written in verse, they are written with the intention of being read, not acted, are seldom produced, and are never attended. Of love, our novels discuss the problems and our movies the act much more entertainingly than do the poets, and as far as the usefulness of poetry to the public is concerned, I am sure that it is much less of an effort, and perhaps a great deal more effective, to hold a young lady's hand in the dark while watching a moving and enticing image than to read her a poem. Moreover, even the poets themselves cannot always write about love.

After their first lyric youth they become tired of the subject and are left the possessors of an admirable technique and no subject. They know, as no one else does, the affective meaning of words; how in the most enticing manner to say nothing at all. So consequently they find their most appropriate job where this particular talent is the most in demand: they enter into advertising and become the inventors of modern salesmanship. I have been told of a sign in the window of a Paris shop selling stockings: "Your legs are poems. Get them bound by Kayser." It was signed, I was informed, "Jean Cocteau."

Much less distinguished copywriters than he have had their poetic training. "Whiter, whiter, softly soaks clothes whiter, whiter, whiter" and "So round, so firm, so fully packed, so free and easy on the draw" may both lack a certain dignity of sentiment, but they are most certainly the work of competent poets. The most expensive and honorific of all objects commonly sold are handpainted pictures, and more than soap or cigarettes, contemporary painting is in need of friends and a market. It is a dangerous and adventurous field as well, demanding of the explorer who ventures within its mazes a sure taste, a subtle mind, and a nice eye. So the poets take charge.

Taking charge is seldom to the poets' pecuniary disadvantage. Poets have all known painters since their earliest youth. They all possess collections of

pictures, most of them given them free or bought at the lowest imaginable price from their painter friends. It is not a negligible consideration that when they take command of the painting market they advance as well the value of their own collection.

A musician among my friends tells me of a visit the poet Paul Eluard paid him at his Paris flat. As the poet walked in the door he said: "First let me see your pictures."

Mind you, poets do not necessarily know anything about painting. But they are very sensitive indeed about subject matter. They exercise an almost theological strictness in its censorship and defend jealously the access to the channels of publicity against all but, in their eyes, the most worthy. If the poets were not organized the painter could treat them as he would any other client, even though they never buy a picture except at the lowest "*prix d'ami*" and are consequently as difficult and as capricious as any other deadhead. No one really values anything unless he has paid for it and paid well. But since the poets are organized, they cannot be persuaded as private buyers or made friends with as individuals, but must be conciliated as a committee. A multiplicity of judges is always difficult to deal with. The painter must offend none of them. So the work the poets crown is likely to be as null and as inoffensive as any war memorial. And though for a few painters and a

few styles the poets may procure enormous prices and worldwide fame, on the profession as a whole they are an encumbrance. For they usurp the painter's professional authority, force him into the depiction of dialectical intricacies, and pull him away from patient inquiry into the aspects of the visible world, which is his only true pursuit. And disapproving of a subject matter, how easily can the poets say, bringing terror into the stoutest heart: "So-and-so has lost his talent."

(Although the poets are the undisputed masters of publicity, they seem unable to turn publicity to their own advantage. Gertrude Stein, who was in her own words a "saint of publicity," and whose name is the most widely known of all the poets who have written in English today, even at a time when one of her prose works was having an enormous sale under the sponsorship of the Book-of-the-Month Club, was never able to sell more than one small edition of any of her books of poetry—about the same number of copies that can be sold of any poet who is known to the other poets, but not advertised to the general public.)

The other parasite of the painting profession is equally respectable. It is the art-appreciation racket. It works by the dissemination of culture. It functions mostly through the museums.

Some ladies of my acquaintance, making a jour-

ney by train, encountered a young engineer from Oak Ridge. They tried hard to make him talk about the atomic bomb. He would not, but taking a book from the seat beside him and showing them its title he said: "I will tell you instead about modern art. That is my hobby." They found it very interesting that one so young, so important, and so scientific could also be so artistic.

I find it very interesting, too. A hobby is either something you practice or something you collect. Stamps, for instance, cannot be a hobby unless you collect them or counterfeit them. And I am sure that a young man employed in the fission of the atom would not have the time, or the money either, to paint or to collect modern pictures. Perhaps he meant something else. Perhaps he was making a collection of the advertising literature of the modern museums.

At this point let me assure the reader that however much a familiarity with the names and pictures of the modern painters may aid his conversation at a dinner party, this familiarity is only a form of cultivation and is not a hobby. Nor does it constitute a picture collection. Neither is it in any way the practice of art in our time. And unless you commune by buying pictures, or are a part of the priesthood because—even if only on Sundays—you paint, you are not in any way a member of the church.

The young engineer had obviously been sub-

jected to the art-appreciation racket. He probably thought that looking at a booklet was as much fun as painting in oil. And I am sure that he actually believed that in learning a few names and some æsthetic theories and in buying a couple of prints, he had become an accomplished authority on all art and a collector of paintings.

The art-appreciation racket has its musical counterpart, the music-appreciation racket, which is taught in schools and colleges and is designed to persuade all the world that the important part of music is not making it, but listening to it, and that the only music worth listening to is the standard romantic repertory, which is for sale and can be bought at any store selling records. It is just as simple as that. It is a plague and a pest to the music makers and composers who are not on the acceptable list—and few modern composers are—but it brings in vast sums to the companies making the records. And it is a bore to the public as well. For it enables the symphony orchestras to play over and over, again and again, the same nine Beethoven and four Brahms, as devoutly as if they were officiating at Mass. It is, you see, a machine for the dissemination of a standardized product, which works by persuading the public that the standardized product is all there is to be had. In exactly the same way, the aim of art appreciation is to persuade the public that there are certain standard pictures known as “art,” and to sell this art, not in the form

of paintings, but in the form of colored reproductions.

Art appreciation has not yet arrived at the perfection of music appreciation. Nor can it until pictures can be reproduced in color prints as satisfactorily as music can be recorded on discs. But its purpose is exactly the same: to sell reproductions. This it does by educating the public to believe that man's whole duty toward art is the appreciation of pictures, and that when a color print has been sold the entire purpose of the painter has been accomplished. The racket is a menace to the painter, who has only paintings to sell, who shares not at all in the profits of the sale of a reproduction, and who, undersold by the reproduction, is in danger of selling no pictures at all. After a Van Gogh exhibition held some years ago at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the racket worked so successfully that the entire country was filled with people who, because they had bought a portfolio of reproductions, were fully satisfied that they were patrons of art and because they were convinced that they already possessed the best, would never again be in the slightest way interested in spending their money on art, much less in buying a real painting.

Copies of pictures have always been made. People used to buy them to hang in place of the originals they could not obtain or afford. The copies sometimes cost a great deal of money and sometimes were very good. Occasionally the painter

himself even made them of his own pictures. The manufacture of copies by copyists proved a lucrative, if minor, profession within the art. Nevertheless, everybody knew that copies were not as good as originals. "Slavish copy" has become in the language a commonplace denigratory expression. But "photographic reproduction" curiously enough means quite an admirable thing. For "photographic" brings to the common mind that the camera cannot lie, and "reproduction" implies the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. So the racket would have us believe that to possess a photographic reproduction does not mean at all that one has bought a "slavish copy" known to be inaccurate and not as good as the original. But it would persuade us that in this color print one has acquired miraculously, through the grace of modern science and technological progress, and at a vastly reduced price, the thing itself. Which is in no way true.

Actually the present-day color print is abominable. Not in color, scale of detail, size, value of lights and darks, texture, or paint qualities does it reproduce the picture it is supposed to represent. It is impossible to make any sort of judgment about a picture from the inspection of one of these prints. For that purpose a good black-and-white photograph is much more useful, although for this even a black-and-white photograph is sometimes of little real use. Some years ago there was a lawsuit concerning which of two pictures, the one owned by a

Mrs. Hahn or *La Belle Ferronnière* in the Louvre, was the original Leonardo. From the photographs published at the time of the trial it was quite obvious that the picture in the Louvre was the original. But from the photographs in a recent book by Mr. Hahn it is equally obvious that the picture belonging to the Hahn family is the original. It all depends on which photograph you take.

Just the same, black-and-white photographs of pictures have a perfectly legitimate place in art and art scholarship. They are invaluable to the student and the art historian, who could not possibly be expected to have seen, or to have available, every picture there is in his field. Besides, if the black-and-white photograph is large enough and has been taken by a skillful enough photographer, it actually looks like the original picture, and although it will not make any pretense of being a replica, it will, nevertheless, give a more accurate idea of the actual qualities even of the paint surface of a work than will any color reproduction.

It is possible, of course, to make better color reproductions than are commonly to be had. There used to come out of Germany color prints that were reasonably good. They were, I think, the exact size of the originals and printed with a great number of lithographic plates, one for each color the painter had used. Each plate was elaborately retouched by hand, so that the prints were actually a sort of lithographic copy of the picture and not

modern or scientific or progressive at all. However, this method of reproduction requires such skilled work and is so expensive that it is scarcely possible for the racket to use. Nevertheless, a suitable process will be found. It is only a question of time. And the setup is all there awaiting its discovery. Once the proper technological progress has been made, art appreciation is prepared to step in and take the painters over.

A culture racket of this sort can operate more easily in the provinces than in a painting center like Paris. In the center, with more painters around and more pictures being sold, everyone understands the difference between a print and a hand-painted oil painting. They know that the reproduction will never increase in value and that the painting will. Whereas a less experienced public will not be aware of any difference between the real thing and the paper symbol for it. Thus in the provinces art appreciation is a real danger, particularly as it has behind it the prestige of the expensive luxury that oil painting has now become.

The most powerful branch of art appreciation, the one devoted to modern art and its reproduction, is a source of considerable confusion to a very large section of the public. In an earlier day, Clive Bell's "significant form" confused a great many people because the word "form" has at least four meanings—flat shape, three dimensional solid, pictorial composition, composition in sequence, as in

music, and so on—and “significant” may mean anything you like. The modern branch of art appreciation confuses the public in somewhat the same way. Because art appreciation itself—with its natural but unfortunate dependence on pedagogical systems—has been confused by a too close attention to the theories of the Bauhaus (a school for art, architecture, and the techniques of the kindergarten that flourished in Dessau after the other war), which, with a Germanic thoroughness and scientific literalness, actually believed and taught that abstract art was abstract. And art appreciation has become very like the Boston lady who said so happily to Monteux after he had conducted the first performance there of Stravinsky’s *Le Sacre du Printemps* (it was some years ago): “This will do away with all the music of the past, will it not?”

Consequently art appreciation has tried to make a separation between modern art and all other art. It has only succeeded in persuading the great public that modern art is abstruse, pretentious, and phony, and that any other sort of art is reactionary, provincial, or expensive. So that by now the mind of the great public is confused about all painting. It feels either superior or suspicious. And its purse is completely closed.

Not long ago there were many brands of cigarettes on the market. Drug stores used to have whole show cases devoted to their amazing multiplicity, brands at every price and for every taste. With big

advertising their number has dwindled to about half a dozen, and unless one lives in cities and goes to special shops, that is all there are. This is exactly what is getting ready to happen to painting. But the case is sadder. Cigarettes are only a local and contemporary anodyne. Painting is an important part of any civilization.

Art appreciation uses advertising with discretion and effect. It sends to all the schools and small museums throughout the country its tracts and exhibitions of abstract painting and modern art. It is nevertheless offering a product that the public of the small cities, for the most part, does not understand. This public has perhaps heard of the *Blue Boy*, the *Mona Lisa*, and the *Horse Fair*. It has seen none of these pictures and very few others. Educating this public to the appreciation of abstract painting is like buying an elegant hat for a lady who has no clothes at all but the slip she is wearing. This provincial public does not need abstract art, cannot use it in any of the living it is doing. But since abstract art is so well presented and on such good authority, the local public concludes that all contemporary art is abstract art and, since the art it has been shown is generally in the form of reproductions, the local public concludes further that contemporary painting is only color prints. So that, although this provincial public is well brought up, and consequently keeps its respect for this art because it is art, it will never again spend its money

on any painting that is remotely connected in its mind with that word.

I know a number of painters living in the provinces and selling their pictures who manage very nicely because it has never occurred to any of their clients that what they were getting was art. These painters are very careful not to let that idea enter their clients' heads. For then the clients would begin to compare what they were buying with what the modern exhibitions bring them and very quickly would begin to be difficult. Thus, in the interior of the country no local youth who is painting anything that can be identified as art can possibly earn a living at it. Although the country is full of youngsters with energy and plenty of talent, after a few years of working at it with no one buying, with no possible market in sight, and in competition as they are with modern art and high-pressure salesmanship, they are forced to drop painting entirely and enter into some more generous profession.

If art appreciation does not help the young painter, it does not help the established painter either. The painter profits only by the first sale of a picture. This first sale is the result of a personal contact the client has made with the painter and his work—either when the painter paints a picture for a client or when the client sees a picture the painter has already painted and, because he wants it, buys it. But when the art of painting gets to be

sold as culture and as public education and not as pictures, the painter is likely to go hungry. For art appreciation is in no way a merchant selling a painter's pictures for him. It deals in culture and, at most, sells reproductions, booklets, and color prints, whose profits go into the editor's and printer's, and not into the painter's, pockets. The painter is put in competition with institutions made for the public dissemination of education and culture, which, being subsidized, can offer it free. But the painter is not subsidized. He cannot give it away. His only living comes from the sale of his pictures. The New York Museum of Modern Art, the most conspicuous and perhaps the most interesting of the American museums devoted to modern art, with its textbooks and traveling exhibitions, however good the intentions may be, can only operate to raise the market value of the particular pictures it advertises, all of them painted long ago and now out of the painter's hands—perhaps in the collection of the museum's own trustees.

If art appreciation's only purpose were to sell reproductions to people who cannot afford the original paintings, unremunerative as it might be for the painter, it would nonetheless bring very legitimately to a great many people a pleasure they could not otherwise enjoy. But art appreciation also operates to plug names, boost reputations, sell paintings, and turn painting prematurely into art. And it is there that the painter is likely to find that art

appreciation is a racket. Because the pictures for which art appreciation performs these services all belong to a very special and a very limited group.

Old pictures have secure enough market prices. They are already art. They are already owned by somebody, and their transfer from hand to hand profits little by the admiration of the general public or by public education. About the younger painters, art appreciation cannot possibly know, nor could it manipulate them if it did. Their pictures have not even begun to be art, their market prices are not yet secure enough for art appreciation to operate on, and there is not yet any considerable body of their work in any dealer's hands. So appreciation concerns itself with some of the aspects of the painting done in the first two decades of this century. Of the work of this period, there are many examples in the collections of picture merchants and of trustees of museums. Appreciation's aim is to raise the prices of these pictures as quickly as possible and to establish them at old-master levels. These pictures are admirable pictures by admirable painters. There is no more doubt about that than that the romantic symphonists, whom music appreciation has made its own, are admirable composers. Nevertheless, these pictures do not constitute all of contemporary art any more than the romantic repertory constitutes all of music, and the indoctrination of the public about these pictures, as it is done by art appreciation, is in no way

disinterested or catholic. For it takes professional judgment out of the hands of the painters and presents this very small and very special group of pictures and names as the only and the best on the purely external authority of a ring of professors, æsthetes, and collectors whose documentation and erratic personal preferences are derived, at the very nearest, as a third-hand, hearsay, hand-me-down from the only real authority in the matter—the sound knowledge of the painter himself about his own craft.

At a time when the Museum of Modern Art was being very unjustly attacked for owning too many examples of the work of the sculptor Hans Arp, Alfred Barr, its director, was quoted as justifying its policy by saying, in effect, that when the Museum had bought the pieces (at prices ranging from seventeen to sixty-eight dollars), they were worth only a fraction of their present market value. So, obviously, the Museum, as was fair enough, had made what might be regarded as a considerable profit. But the works themselves had long ago left Arp's studio, and the museum has no obligation whatever to share its profits with him. We can only hope that if the museum again buys works by Arp, it will be at the advanced market prices, or at least that the publicity Arp has received will enable him to make other sales.

A museum of modern art is, as you can see, a bullish market, fine for the collector, but with little

to offer to the painter himself, except perhaps a retrospective exhibition—a funeral of the first class, which few, if any, can hope to survive.

At this point I hear a question.

“But Mr. Corot, don’t you think, nevertheless, that it is wonderful of the museums to enable the people to see all this art?”

Let me ask a question in return. What is the proper function of a museum? Of a university? Of an art school? Of a picture dealer? The answer to that is easy. A picture dealer sells pictures. An art school teaches people how to paint and how to teach painting. A university is a repository of history. A museum is a repository of instructive objects.

Let us visit a museum. First we pass through the turnstile and are counted. At some museums, I am told, even employees returning from lunch must pass through the turnstile and thus swell the figures of attendance. The number of listeners is very important to a radio sponsor. The number of people who pass by its windows is very important to a department store. But both the store and the sponsor have something to sell. If a museum were nothing but a repository of instructive objects, it should be important to its directors that these objects be reasonably easy to get at, and the number of people who pass its door need not concern them at all. However, since most museums, some more than others, are very much concerned with the gross

number of their visitors, one is led to suspect that their directors, as well as being custodians of valuable objects, are also tempted to act as sales managers or as publicity agents. And since the pictures on their walls are not for sale, the directors in these other roles must be interested either in what they actually do offer for sale—their colored prints—or in advertising celebrated names.

There is considerable difference between making knowledge available and boosting reputations. For example during the New York season a great deal of music is available. Eventually almost all the music that anybody is interested in gets played, and by good musicians. When the same musicians who executed all this vast repertory in New York go on tour, they present a repertory that is very limited. The musicians of, say, Atlanta will never hear on the local concert stage the variety of music they could make for themselves at home. But the provincial amateurs are only a small part of the public and of little interest to the director of a concert circuit. He knows very well that in the provinces a variety of unfamiliar music would offend the large public that can be induced to buy a ticket only on the condition that well-known pieces played by well-known names make up the program. The director of the circuit knows that he is not selling music but names, and that conditioning the public to remember a name is infinitely easier and more profitable to him than cultivating its taste.

If a modern museum were occupied in cultivating popular taste or in encouraging painting, it would try to promote the sale of real pictures. Because a picture by the most unoriginal imitator of, say, Picasso is more interesting to have on the wall than any reproduction of Picasso could be. The painting is hand work. It is alive, the painter has infused it with some of his own vitality. And it may not be such a bad picture after all. It may, by the passage of time, which often reveals hitherto unnoticed qualities, turn out to be a better picture than anyone had thought, even turn out to be a celebrated work of art. But a color print is a corpse; it can only deteriorate. Its market value also can only drop. And its presence on a wall is as depressing (or as vulgar) as would be a framed piece of paper on which was printed the symbol for twenty-five thousand dollars.

The color reproduction is, in fact, very like the treasury note. Both are a symbol for money value. Both have no value in themselves. But there is this difference. The treasury note has been issued against a certain amount of metal on deposit, and the more notes there are out against this metal, the less each note is worth. On the contrary, the more color prints there are in circulation, the more the original painting can be sold for.

Consequently, a museum that is promoting the sale of reproductions is not promoting painting, because it is not encouraging people to buy pic-

tures from painters—which is the only way there is of keeping their art alive. It is plugging names and acting as an agent of resale—which does not help the painter or aid in any way the practice of painting. It is occupied in whetting the public's appetite for famous names.

Painters, as I have pointed out before, do not profit by the resale of their pictures. In France there is a law, designed to curb speculation in pictures and fictitious sales among merchants, by which the painter or his heirs receives a small percentage of the resale price of his picture every time it is resold at public auction. Nothing like this practice exists elsewhere. Even in France painters do not profit from the sale of reproductions. Unless a painter copyrights his pictures and reserves his reproduction rights—something few American painters ever take the trouble to do—he has no rights whatever over the reproduction of his work. Letters, as physical objects, belong to the person to whom they are addressed. But as ideas they belong to the writer and cannot be published without his consent. Painters have no such rights. Indeed the painter has so few rights that if someone is writing a book about him and wants to illustrate it with reproductions of his pictures, he must get permission, not from the painter himself, but from the collector who owns them.

Nor is it an uncommon practice of museums to buy a picture from a painter, sometimes very

cheaply indeed, on the pretext that it is an honor to be hung in a museum, and then make a considerable profit on the sale of its reproductions. This they are in no way bound to share with the painter, nor do they. Museums have even been known to buy a picture and sell the permission to reproduce it to an advertising agency. From such a transaction not only does the painter receive no profit, but some advertising artist loses a possible fee.

The position of the museum in Europe is much less equivocal than all this. European museums are operated on public funds. Consequently, their directors are responsible only to the public. Here in America museums are operated mostly as private foundations. In the older museums the directors are not easily diverted from their proper functions, to serve the interest of the charitable benefactors—these donors being for the most part dead. So the older museums can perform the function, just as they should, of being disinterested guardians of valuable objects. The funds of the newer museums, on the other hand, are administered by trustees who are for the most part the original donors and founders. Consequently, the activities of these museums cannot be entirely disinterested. Trustees of art museums are generally collectors of pictures in private life as well. It would be very surprising if a museum, under such circumstances and out of common courtesy, would not help a little in making more famous the famous

names in the collections of its trustees, and in proving that, after all, the judgment of its trustees in matters of art is sound. Hence the museum plugs names, often the particular names that are represented in its trustees' private collections.

The result of all this is quite simple. A public indoctrinated in such a fashion cannot learn the history of painting or even the history of art. It can only become familiar with a series of examples chosen from the history of collecting. However, the history of collecting, although it is not the history of art, is nevertheless of great interest to the art historian. For, just as it is only painters who know how to make painting, it is equally true that it is only collectors who are capable of turning painting into art.

As we leave the museum we pass a counter where color prints are on display for sale, framed, spotlighted, and attended by the prettiest of sales girls. I know you will be tempted to buy a print. Take, let us say, a Van Gogh. It costs little here, but on your wall it will represent a large sum of money. Some other painter's work might represent a smaller sum. The print of an unknown painter you must not take. That would be spurious coin. Prints of the same size all cost the same; we may as well have the best. And color prints are not without their use. Put half a dozen of them on your walls. Invite your painter friends to your house, not once but

often. On their first visit the painters will begin by admiring your prints, saying what good taste you have. After the third visit they will become uneasy. And in the end, if they continue to frequent your house, they will have been made so unhappy by these facsimiles of money and immortality that they will all have lent and given you their best pictures to replace them. Thus, by the investment of a very few dollars indeed, you will have formed the beginnings of a collection of hand-painted oils all your very own.

CHAPTER 10

The Costume of Love

"That artist sure is fast!"

*"Can't you talk English? It's girls
is fast. Boys is mannish."*

LITTLE COLORED BOY AND GIRL
IN CHATTANOOGA

THE BANISHMENT of the nude from contemporary art is curious enough to deserve notice. It has played the very dickens with the sculptors.

The nude is sculpture's only proper subject. Animals, architectural ornament, panoplies of arms, and vegetables—what in painting would be called still life—are all very pretty, but for the sculptor relatively unimportant. Anatomy is the sculptor's science. If he is able, he lives surrounded by his naked models, has them constantly at hand so that at any moment he can consult these living manuals, these walking anatomical diagrams, on the attachment of a muscle or the progress of a form. Even

the clothed figure he has always treated as a nude with a veil of cloth. In fact sculpture exists because of the assumption that the naked human body is an interesting and a presentable thing. The history of this assumption is worth going into.

In the Greece of classical times, nakedness was one of the possible forms of formal attire, corresponding somewhat in its upper-class and urbane implications to our own dinner jacket. I say this with some assurance on the authority of the historian Thucydides. According to him the characteristics of the civilized man are these: he lives in cities, he does not carry arms, he does not practice piracy, and he goes naked. There are, he says, Greeks still living in the remote parts of Greece who, like the barbarians and like the uncivilized Greeks of less-enlightened times, wear belts when they take part in public games. But a civilized man goes naked. Consequently, Greek sculptors, in presenting the gentlemen naked and the ladies sometimes naked and sometimes in a transparent and clinging dress, were simply copying a current costume of the period.

This convention was respected in the colder and more barbarian Rome as an exotic and somewhat, so to speak, "Frenchified" mannerism. And although nudity as a costume was admitted, it was considered more a gladiatorial than a gentlemanly costume, and the Roman gentlemen were for the most part shown in their portrait statues in their

senatorial robes or military accouterments, and the ladies in the voluminous dresses of their rank. Nevertheless, there can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of New York a full-length portrait statue of the Roman Emperor Gallus, done in the third century of our era—a statue of a large man, rather heavy around the middle, evidently an excellent likeness, and dressed only in his shoes.

But all this is depiction of nudity as a local costume, not the use of the nude as an erotic symbol. The frankly erotic nude is older than history. There are examples from the Cro-Magnon deposits. Its purpose, as an image of a god or as an inducement to fertility, is always precisely indicated—as in the Diana of Ephesus—by the character of its attributes. But what I shall call the voluptuous nude in art, the nude evincing a gentler and more generalized eroticism than this, is much more recent. It was, I think, a Hellenistic invention. It appeared about the time when Macedon, with its acquired taste for Asiatic comfort, had displaced Sparta, with its tradition of military discipline and the simple life, from leadership in Grecian affairs. The voluptuous nude was exported in effigies of gods and goddesses, in pictures and statues and cameos and terra cottas, on fans and mirrors and jewels, on chairs and tables, on buckets, wine cups, and perfume bottles, to all the Græco-Roman world, as a symbol, not, I think, of love, but of luxury and of Greek taste, of the amenities of civilization and of the pleasantness of

life. And wherever Hellenistic culture had spread, the formal garb of nudity could be worn with perhaps the same sort of connotations and sentimental evocations of the past and of its grandeurs as the ante-bellum gown evokes in our Southern states.

After the shift of the Roman empire to the east, Hellenistic art disappeared. Byzantium was exporting something quite different—an authoritarian faith—and had no use at all for the symbols of a paganism and of a luxury trade that it opposed. Under the direction of the church, the Greek, or perhaps Syrian-Greek, artists carried to the limits of the known world the symbols and attributes of royalty, of authority, and of godhead. The voluptuous nude disappeared. Very few nudes, and those very conventional ones, can be found in Byzantine art. This does not mean that the people of those times were unnaturally chaste, nor does it in any way prove that, then or later, nudity was banned as a public costume. Throughout the Middle Ages men and women bathed naked together in the public bath-houses, and in carnivals, municipal celebrations, and *joyeuse entrées* (which were festivals confirming the friendship and mutual rights of a sovereign and a town), the presence of naked ladies of both professions—the honest and the oldest—embellished the floats and spectacles. Painters after Cimabue did not hesitate to show Adam and Eve in their appropriate costume of nothing at all, or to depict the souls in limbo as naked. But they were using naked-

ness, not in its enticing, but in its functional, its story-telling aspect, as a way of presenting the primal innocence of our first parents or of demonstrating the cold and helpless discomfort of the damned. There is not to be found in all the art of the Middle Ages (except perhaps as a symbol for the devil) a single example of the voluptuous nude.

By the middle of the fifteenth century public nudity had disappeared from Italy. A mid-century Italian Humanist, Giordano Bruno, who certainly was no prude if one can judge from his taste in anecdotes, was shocked to find himself being scrubbed by a naked female attendant in a bathing house in Basel. A *joyeuse entrée* of Charles V in the first decades of the sixteenth century is the last time in Europe that ladies decorated a public occasion with joyful nakedness. At the beginning of the fifteenth century Greek learning had reappeared in Europe. The end of the same century witnessed the introduction of syphilis and the re-appearance of the voluptuous nude in art.

It would seem to me that the grouping of this quatrefoil cannot be entirely accidental. If the voluptuous nude reappeared in painting by the agency of Greek learning as a symbol of a gracious and civilized and vanished way of living, it remained there as an allegory of the kinder aspects of the love, which in its physical reality was becoming, with the raging of the pox, more perilous every day. Reform engulfed the world. Passions were un-

leashed by ecclesiastical controversy. New churches were founded on the condemnation of priestly irregularity. Chastity was appointed queen of all the virtues. The voluptuous nude in art flourished. Lucas Cranach, painter of the most perverse and, to some tastes, the most seductive, of all pin-up girls, is an exact contemporary of the Reformation.

Of the three possible uses of the nude in art—as the depiction of an actual costume, as a classical reference, or as an erotic symbol—the last two have been most common from Renaissance times to our own. Nudity as a garb has appeared so little in public since the end of the fifteenth century that this use of it in art is difficult and rare. Of our own times Degas is one of the few painters who has succeeded with so treacherous a subject and by some extraordinary quality of mind has managed, in his *Spartan Girls Challenging the Spartan Boys to Wrestle*, to paint a historical scene as if it were a contemporary and everyday occurrence. Other painters of our time in a similar endeavor only succeed in showing us a professional model who is receiving twenty francs an hour for sitting still in, let us hope, a comfortable room. On the other hand, the nude as a classical reference or as an erotic symbol—as nymphs in a forest, as the rape of the Sabines, as Susanna at her bath, as Saint Sebastian embarbed with arrows—has been, from the time of Botticelli until the beginning of this

century, the subject most beloved by artist, public, and client. If it became necessary, the erotic aspect of the nude could always be disguised, satisfactorily enough, in classical presumptions and in historical associations. And although the act of love, even under Victorian delicacy, could not be banished from private use as easily as could the nude from public converse, love could at least be treated under its more remote and spiritual and educational aspects. The poets themselves were not free from this infectious respectability.

A great many years ago Robert Carlton Brown published an *English Poets Censored* after the model of *Mother Goose Censored*, a famous tract against literary censorship and, by blacking out a word here and there, rendered our familiar quotations from the poets so scabrous that, though I will quote some of them in the original, I would not dare to make a translation of them into the bowdlerese. That the reader must do for himself.

My ~~love~~ is like a red red ~~rose~~

*Just for a handful of silver he left us,
Just for a ~~ribbon~~ to stick in his ~~coat~~.*

*Fell softly as an angel's ~~feather~~
Through the high ether silently.*

and so on. All you have to do is to mumble some of the words.

The pre-romantic poets were less changed by

these mutilations. No substitution of a harsher word for "love" or "sweet" made any difference in the sense. For these poets mostly said what they meant and meant precisely what they said. The romantics were more vulnerable. No matter what word was blocked out from the text, their poems became fantastically obscene; as if no matter what subject they were writing about, they were nevertheless thinking about the act of love. This is perfectly possible for love had assumed an enormous and hidden importance. By the end of the eighteenth century, by the time of the beginnings of romanticism, in a world dedicated to respectability and to commercial expansion, love had become the most difficult, the most clandestine and the most expensive of undertakings. The danger of disgrace in a world beset by respectability, and the probability of disease in a world still infested with the pox, had made love costly indeed.

Anything bought at such a price is infinitely tempting and its concomitants honorable. Although nudity as a costume was severely censored—William Blake was called mad because he said, wittily enough, to a visitor who found him sunbathing in his garden in company with his wife, "Don't mind. It's only Adam and Eve"—nudity in art was acceptable and admired and its erotic associations were painstakingly forgotten. Abstracted from love, nudity became the convenient symbol for any abstraction you please—commerce, agriculture, better

government, mathematical genius, or the rights of women. It is an extraordinary thing that more acres of bare human skin were exhibited by this most pudibund of all epochs to the cold winds of public inspection than by any other era since the Greeks and Romans.

All this is the past. In the first years of our century, about the time of the first World War, nudity appeared again as costume and the nude in art went out of style. The nudes of Picasso painted after 1914 are either the severest of classical references or exercises in calligraphic dexterity. Their bent-wire outlines or their tubular forms could not possibly be confused with human flesh. Matisse has done some nudes, but he has treated their bodies as a flat and neutral pattern, a point of rest for the eye, against the much more living wall paper that is really the subject of these pictures. Chirico painted a whole exhibition of nudes. He mistakenly attempted to make his ladies look ancient Roman by seating them on fragments of Corinthian columns. The subject he had chosen was so unfashionable at the time that it was instantly decided that he had lost his talent. Dali's nudes are either monsters or references to an Edwardian prudery—not human beings. Other painters of our time have either avoided the subject or schematized it or if they have treated it, they have all had with it an equal ill success. Nude statues and pictures of the nude, unless they are by such celebrated names that they cannot

be spared, quietly disappear from our museums and from our public parks. The nude in art is gone. At the same time human nudity has become a great deal less opprobrious. Mixed bathing, in a brevity of costume that would have shocked our ancestors, is practiced at all public beaches, and in the state of nature itself at many private ones. Under the ægis of the Protestant church, of the very child of Luther and of the Reformation, complete nudity has been adopted as the costume for swimming in every Young Men's Christian Association in the land.

The sequence is closed. The serpent has bitten his own tail. Perhaps the connection is accidental; nevertheless, upon the advent of syphilis in Europe and at the time of the disappearance of the human nude from public life, the voluptuous nude appeared again in art. And now, five centuries later, the nude disappears from art and begins to be tolerated again in public life, at the precise moment when a cure for syphilis is put at our disposition.

Accident or no accident, today we find ourselves living in a safer world, where private lives are less exposed, where nothing that we can do has any cosmic consequences, where love-making is common and easy and somewhat despised, where the great bond of "two alone against the world" has been dissolved, where romantic love is unfashionable and true love concealed. The textbooks of abnormal psychology, which everyone has read, describe as

abnormal even the simplest of human desires, and although everyone does exactly as he pleases, we all have in our minds as model and comparison, Case History No. 365, and we are all ashamed. All fashions of love-making are known and considered probable; no one wishes to expose his private conduct to public judgment. Consequently, people do not hang pictures of nudes in private houses. The implications, either positive or negative (for the presence of a nude of either sex on the walls of a private house either asserts or denies in the host a particular direction of erotic endeavor), are much too difficult to live down. For the same reason there is no sculpture on our public buildings. It might be carelessly assumed that a committeeman had an undignified taste for nude bodies. It is as if we all made love with our clothes on.

Thank goodness we do not. But nevertheless it is a noticeable fact, perhaps even a symptom of the return to a civilized condition that nudity as a costume, as it is worn today in the Y.M.C.A.'s, in college dormitories, in private houses, and at beaches, is not at all a symbol of sex, but a symbol of innocence and of social equality, of Adam and Eve, and of the educated classes. One can undress before a friend, but not before a servant; the proof of the innocence of a college locker room is its unremarked nakedness. The nude as an erotic symbol has disappeared from our daily life. Its place has been taken over by photography.

The camera has an eye but no hands—it cannot

feel with its fingertips, has no sense of touch or space or warmth. To it all skins are beautiful, all nudes voluptuous. It has its own canons of beauty. These we cannot escape. They crowd in on us in every movie, on every poster, on every billboard, in every magazine, these photographs of young men with muscles and smiles, of young women with bosoms and legs, all as nude as permitted and all, to the camera's eye, beautiful. Nevertheless, this beauty is not beauty, it is sex appeal; not art, but advertising, an exploitation of the public, a method of salesmanship. It is technically known as "glamour." Everything that is sold, from a chewing gum to a system of morality, is packaged with this product of the camera's vision. It is the sugar-coating on the pill, the cellophane around the merchandise (a substance I have seen in use in shop windows to guarantee the virginity of such unlike objects as a grand piano and a banana).

This camera's vision of the nude, this sex appeal, is not in the least sexy, does not encourage the congress of the sexes. On the contrary, it is autoerotic. It is the idea each of us has of his own body as he thinks of his own image in a mirror, and leads away from love. We live in the midst of these monsters of photography. They are always about us. It is almost impossible for us to clean this dirt out of our eyes. Just as in Victorian times the idea of the nude body was inevitably connected with the idea of shame, in our own time the idea of the nude body (because the photograph is mistaken

for life) is inescapably connected with the idea of sex appeal. So, to the voluptuary, who confuses the pin-up with his own experiences, all nude bodies are exciting, while to the inexperienced, who is shocked by the difference he finds between the camera's vision and his own, all nude bodies are appalling.

If a painter or a sculptor of today yields to the oppressive canons of sex appeal, as did Vargas and Petty, his work becomes vulgar and commercial. For even if it is done with the purest of motives, it can nevertheless be easily used to add glamour to a sales talk. If he avoids these artificial strictures, his work, though it may appear imposing as art, will seem to everybody distorted and unacceptable. Nowadays there is no place any longer for the nude in art; we have too much sex appeal around us in life.

The painter can get along very well without the nude. There are plenty of other things he can paint, and if he must, he can fit the nude into the pattern of daily life, as did Degas and Bonnard, by painting it with a bathtub. But sculpture cannot get along without the nude, nor have I ever seen a bathtub introduced into a sculptured group.* The nude, or at least the nude figure with the thinnest

* I have been informed that there exists a Rogers group, formerly used to advertise Pear's Soap, of Venus washing Cupid in a bathtub.

of drapery, is the sculptor's only serious subject. His one subject forbidden, the unfortunate sculptor gets no orders. The art of sculpture is too elaborate and arduous and expensive to be undertaken as a private amusement; the sculptor no longer learns his trade. The ones who get the few jobs there are to be had, hide their inexperience under a professional-looking streamlining. The others do few and small pieces. It is a hard time for them all. Today is the first time in history when architecture does not use sculpture for its adornment. The empty niche has become a standard architectural ornament—and for quite other reasons than that of Ronald Firbank's queen, who found the empty niche "so suggestive."

Perhaps, nevertheless, the sculptor's luck is about to change. The study of Greek and Latin, once a gentleman's only education and the unique curriculum of every school, has almost disappeared from present-day instruction. Perhaps after four centuries of it, classical culture has at length been absorbed and digested. Very little of it nowadays remains strange or different from our habitual ways of thinking. Perhaps we are at length becoming civilized. We live in cities, do not, as private persons, carry arms, do not, except as corporate bodies, indulge in the practice of piracy. Perhaps presently we will also begin to go naked. The yearly shrinking of our already scanty bathing costumes promises progress in that direction. Nevertheless, nudity is

not real unless it is complete. Nor can, with any justice, the Australian bushman be called nude who reduces his zone of immodest exposure to a point at the very tip of his organ of generation, upon which he clips the shell of a snail. He may not be as warm, but he is as clothed as any of us. If, however, we again begin to go naked, if nudity once again becomes a neutral and a presentable form of apparel, if sex appeal—as is possible—by its very abuse loses its power and disappears, then sculpture will resume its place among us as the greatest and the most permanent of all the arts. And the sculptor will again be able to celebrate what is properly his subject, not the classical associations or the erotic evocations, but the actual nobility of that animal which, we are too apt to forget, is God's sublimest work.

CHAPTER 11

Painting and the Public

*"When will that picture come
on at the Tivoli?"*

ROSSVILLE MOVIE FAN

I SUPPOSE the practitioner of any profession is always shocked when he sees in the movies how the public likes to envisage him. Doctors in the films are always young men whose main problem in life is deciding whether to have a chaste career in the laboratory fondling their test tubes, or to go out into the world where they will fondle the hands of a rich, older, but still extremely attractive, female patient. Newspaper reporters are depicted as gentlemen who continually quarrel with their editors, travel only by plane, and have an unlimited expense account. Opera singers in the movies are always running away from impresarios, instead of, as it happens in life, the other way around. Young long-hair composers arrive at fame through Tin-pan Alley. And painters are always rich.

Would that it were true! And that the other agreeable aspects of the painter's life conjured up by the movies were true also—that our models were as pretty as those we are surrounded with in the films, that we lived in as luxurious studios, and that we sold our pictures for as impressive sums as we do there! (I have never seen a painter in the movies sell a picture for less than three thousand dollars.) There are other aspects of our glorification that we like less—we are depicted as artists, soulful and temperamental; we have dreamy eyes and long thin fingers; the pictures we paint, if one ever catches a glimpse of them, are invariably the most deplorable daubs, and our private lives are spent in the throes and clutches of romantic love. Just as the newspaper reporter of the films is not a reporter at all, but the much more glorious press agent, the lowly painter in the films is given a romantic sensibility and is glamorized into the æsthete.

We don't like it. We are not like that. We are a serious professional body doing a serious job. As individuals we possess only just enough sex appeal for our own private uses. Our lives may be a little more free (because we can travel a little more easily) than the doctors' or the lawyers' but no more romantic, and we are likely to harbor no more romantic illusions than does any other serious artisan.

This is natural enough. Since the art of painting first began, painters have always known how to do two very serious things, and have always been

kept busy doing both of them: adding to the world's riches and teaching people how to see. Out of a few bits of cloth and wood, some oil, and colored powders, the painter makes his pictures. The materials are nothing; the picture is immensely valuable. Though the picture may temporarily lose its value because it has gone out of style, if it has ever once had the approval of other painters, it will always come back into style again, regain its value, and remain immensely valuable until it falls apart with decay. The perfection, elaboration, and character of this picture, this work of art, has always been taken as a record and a measure of the qualities of the civilization in which it was produced.

Besides creating wealth, the painter invents the visible aspects of the world and presents them in a dramatic form that everyone can see. That he can do because he knows how to see. His is also the only profession that knows about shape and form and proportion and color, and their use in making things be visible and look right. That he knows, not just because he has some bright ideas, but because he has some hard-gained knowledge from the work of making pictures. Consequently, one of his proper functions in the world is that of being the final judge of any piece of design. Whenever design has been good, that has been one of the things expected of him.

However, just because he is a painter, do not expect him to be all over the place, in everybody's

way, sticking his nose where it does not belong, messing around with minor trades or inferior techniques. He is not a simple technician; he is the inventor of all these things. At such a repetitive and subservient occupation he would be a bore to everybody including himself. Nevertheless, I would like to see him regain his lost prestige. To do that is simple. All he needs is to paint and sell lots of pictures. Then he will regain his self-respect, he will again become the arbiter of taste, his profession will again be what it has been in the past, the noblest, the freest, and the most lucrative of all the crafts, and he can let the arts take care of themselves. And the painters, as a numerous and prosperous body, could make the world again into the visual-minded place that today it certainly is not.

I would not ask the painters to organize themselves into any restrictive guild. Remembering the painters I know, I do not think it could be done. Painters are too irregular, too disparate, too diversified. Besides, any organization of painters there has been in the past—except possibly the medieval guilds—has been the organization of one group of painters at the expense of the profession as a whole. The medieval guild worked because at that time there was an enormous demand for painting—by the state, by the church, and by private individuals. The whole profession was organized around the painter's training, for the specific purposes of protecting the painter from his clients and of assuring

a high level of quality in the product the client had ordered. The present-day medical profession is organized in exactly the same way and for exactly the same ends.

Today, however, the demand for painting is small. Consequently, there is no reason for the guild to exist, and the painting profession has become, quite naturally, an unorganized group of great men and individual talents who have very little responsibility at all to any professional body or system of schooling. This is exactly what would happen to the medical profession if the demand for the services of the doctor almost ceased.

The composers are organized as a part of the union of performing musicians, over whom they exert a real, however distant, authority. But it would make no sense at all for the painters to join their nearest organized affiliation, the union of painters and paper hangers, who are not even aware of the existence of the artist-painter. Any organization of the painters done from the outside, say by the League of Young Republicans or by the Communist Party or by the Manufacturers' Association, I and many others would not accept. The organizing group would certainly be using the painter's prestige for its own ends, and not to serve the specific interests of the painter himself. Nevertheless, if any one would show me a scheme for organizing all the painters—broad enough to take in everybody, and directed against our common enemies—I, for

one, would join it at once. But I do not think that today, with our small market, such an organization is possible or even needed.

Nevertheless, such an organization, in a loose form, already exists. And every single painter, whether he wants to or not, no matter what his politics or his æsthetics, no matter who are his friends or who buys his pictures, belongs to it. And he belongs by the simple fact that he has studied drawing in a life class and that he has once sold a picture. It is the professional body of painters.

But if this body is to work, the painter must act as if he belonged to it. He must take his professional pride out of storage where he has been keeping it, dust it off, and put it on at as cocky an angle as he can. He must not again forget that he is the same species of animal as were all the great painters of the past, and that he is doing exactly the same sort of thing they did before him. He must realize that his profession, in spite of its apparent divisions, is just as solid as it has always been, and that in spite of technological progress—or even, perhaps, because of it—the painter's clear eye and common sense are more needed in the world than ever before. He must know that yesterday or today the difference between one painter and another is not of ideology, but of talent; that the schisms that split his ranks, the turmoils and enmities of modern art and publicity, are not his own disputes, but the quarrels of his patrons and exploiters; that the world

is divided for him, not into friends and enemies, but into friends and clients; and that the more producing painters there are in the world, the better off he is.

I have said it several times before, but it is still true. The more working painters there are, the more general interest there is in painting. The more general interest there is in painting, the more painting is sold. And the more painting is sold, the more producing painters there will be around and the grander will be the product they turn out. I have been told of a small Mississippi town that supports five or six working painters simply because their presence, their number, and their rivalries have excited public interest, where everybody buys water colors, and where all babies, all debutantes, and all mayors sit for portraits. This is, of course, a very provincial market indeed. But the same thing can happen in a larger town if the painters are active and numerous enough and interested enough in what each other is doing.

As I see it, the cause of all the painter's woes is that although there are elaborate and effective means of communication among the dealers who sell painting and among the poets who advertise it, there is practically no means of communication at all among the painters who manufacture it. So I would recommend to every painter the routine of getting acquainted with every painter he can possibly know, of making friends with him and finding

out what he is all about. The painter is accustomed in these lonesome and ungregarious days to live in professional isolation surrounded by his few clients and friends from other trades. He will be surprised to find out what good fellows, how sympathetic, understanding, and intelligent his fellow painters are. And of course they are. They are all doing exactly the things he is doing, facing and solving exactly the problems he has to face and solve. And the differences of opinion among them, which appear political, are really only differences of subject matter and mostly encouraged by the poets.

This may seem a vague remedy for all our ills, and perhaps it is. Nevertheless, unless we painters maintain some system of easy communication among ourselves, we will soon lose what little we have left of our autonomy. Communication by means of art magazines is liable to all sorts of censorship; the magazines are already subject to the appreciation racket. But direct communication between painters by word of mouth, if it can be maintained, cannot be censored at all. And communication between painter and painter, and between painter and public, is of immense importance to us all.

We lost our professional organization when the guilds finally broke up at the end of the eighteenth century. Today we are losing all the other rights of a professional body as well—the education of the

neophytes, the privilege of final judgment on the product and control of its merchandising. I do not mind so much the loss of the guild and of the school. If any form of guild that would work with our diminished market could be designed, I think it would have been tried long ago. And I, who do not have a taste for teaching, view with alarm the effect that teaching regularly, day after day, has upon any painter who tries to earn his living in that particular rat race. But keeping our position as arbiters of painting excellence and as guardians and directors of public taste is of immense importance to us all.

When, in the middle of the eighteenth century, music changed from being a private or courtly amusement and a part of church ceremony to become an entertainment for the great public, the composers of music began to exercise the office of music critic in the public press. And naturally they did it better than anyone else because they knew what music was really about. The list of composers who were also music critics is very large—Wagner, Schumann, Debussy, Berlioz, and many others; in our day, Aaron Copland, Virgil Thomson, Paul Bowles, Henri Sauguet, and so on. When the enjoyment of music had become a public matter it was very important to the musical profession that the public be kept informed by the people who actually knew about it—the composers who wrote the pieces.

Until now painting has always been a private

affair between the painter and his clients. No public was involved. When the public had to be informed about something, it was told either by the scholar or professor, if it concerned art of the past or, if it were a matter of contemporary taste, by the enlightened amateur. For the public was merely being notified about something that had already taken place.

The enlightened amateur, of course, has no professional standing and no real knowledge. True, he must have taste. And, just as flair is the ability to predict the present, taste is the ability to predict the past—to know in advance which past style or object will please. Nevertheless, the possession of taste, though it infers a knowledge of past styles, implies in no way any sense or knowledge whatever about contemporary art. Nor does the enlightened amateur have any responsibility to the professional body of painters. At the most he is a journalist, and as such can always correct in tomorrow's edition, if he is forced to, the errors he has made in today's. Dealing with any contemporary painting matter, he is notoriously prejudiced, venal, or inaccurate. Sometimes all three.

None of this has any importance whatever as long as the painter is dealing directly with a private client. Voice and act are always more convincing than the printed word. But if his exploiters—the poets and art appreciation—actually succeed in forcing painting into the public domain, and

by the dissemination of false culture and half education bewitch away the painter's clients, the painter will be forced to do what the composer did before him—take his pen in hand. There is no reason why the painter cannot. He has all the conviction of the man who knows. And anyone can correct his spelling.

So now the painter has lost his guild. Although his loss has gained him a great personal liberty, it has deprived him of much greater things—he is poor, lives in an ugly world, has more trouble getting his training, and must paint smaller pictures. But perhaps, nevertheless, it is just as well that the painter has no defense, no organization, and no creed. For now he is not really vulnerable anywhere. His profession has nothing more to lose. In the difficult times to come, his alone of all the professions will probably manage to survive and to continue its work of re-creating the world.

Everything else in our world is built on organization, or technological progress, or on both, and there are the most vulnerable things there are. The greater and more complicated an organization, the more easily it can be destroyed by even a preliminary Armageddon. And nothing but an act of God can stop technological progress. That must continue to grow till, like the dinosaur, it crushes itself by its own mass—and us with it. Examples are innumerable. Let us take the films.

In the early days the movies' tools were simple and their expenses were light. Films were enormously amusing to make. It was not necessary for every picture to be a success. The cost of a failure made in doing something perhaps new and interesting could be charged against the profit made on the success of something else, possibly also new and interesting. So the films had great variety, were full of invention, and came in all sizes and shapes for all needs and tastes.

Technological progress brought in the talkies. These cost a great deal more to make. Box-office failures were too expensive to be risked. The sure-fire technique of what was later called the soap opera was early adopted. So also was the exploitation of charm (it was christened sex appeal and depended on various kittenish ways of not going to bed) and the depiction of the spending of money—both infallible comforts for the lonely and poor, who could be counted on as regular customers for these indifferent opiates. The visual gags of the wonderful slapstick comedies, which required the building of elaborate props and the destruction of lots of property, were replaced by cheaper verbal gags which involve no invention or expense whatever, but only insult. Even with all these economies, companies frequently went into a carefully concealed receivership.

With Technicolor, film became too expensive even to cut. Continuity, which of course can be

got only by considerable cutting and waste, became so vague that it now confuses even the habitual moviegoer himself, accustomed as he is to supply the missing sequence out of his memory of similar pictures. The only happy men in Hollywood are the camera men and technological experts. The movie makers themselves, the producers, directors, writers, idea men, designers, and musicians, all the best talent that can be assembled and who are now made to do a job that is infinitely beneath their capabilities, are bored to a guilty inferiority and a hopeless despair by this too easy routine of pleasing. And now television.

They have held it off for ten or fifteen years. They cannot hold it off any longer. Technological progress must prevail. But to feed even two major networks—twice twenty-four hours of new images every day—the industry must unthinkably expand and enormously debase its product, and get paid for it, no longer by the harassed but willing citizen who pursues in a dark and intra-uterine comfort his dreams of love and money, but by the manufacturer, who will pass these astronomical miles of film on to his own public—a small piece of ham in the sandwich of his publicity. And this manufacturer will prove a more doubtful, difficult, unwilling, and conservative censor than even the famous eleven-year-old girl whose limits of experience and comprehension are the standards for today's censorship. The whole industry envisages the future with

anxiety, even with terror. And well it may. I am sure that *Æsop's* fable is wrong, and that the frog does not intend to puff himself up as big as the bull. He only wishes to be a little more imposing, to improve his appearance just a little. But once he has swallowed technological progress there is no stopping. He must swell till he pops.

The painter, alone of all the modern world, has no part in all this—no organization to lose, no dependence on science or speculation or philosophy. It is one to him whether he lives in a relativistic or a Fortian universe. His profession is the one conservative force in our civilization, securely based on seeing-is-believing, and he is soundly occupied in seeing what is before his own nose. He has nothing to do with technological progress or with mass production, for he has nothing to do with the interchangeable units and the precise measurements on which they are both built (even though I have read somewhere that one of the promises of television in Technicolor is that it will bring modern pictures in natural colors into every home). He uses nothing that is of any consequence to him that is not at least five centuries old. He even refuses to paint by electric light. He can do without modern pigments or manufacture them himself. He can paint a picture with materials found in the most primitive household, make brushes out of goose feathers and his wife's old fur piece if he must, and paint out of mud from the ditch. The literary man

needs the printing press and universal literacy; the composer, the familiar musical instruments and their trained executants. The painter alone can view with complete composure the probable extinction of Western culture. For he knows that with the simplest rules of honesty, cookery, and observation, he can build up another one, and for himself at any rate, every bit as good.

